LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS SHLACH

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS SHLACH

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Shlach* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to

help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Shlach is about the aborted entry into the Land of Israel. By correcting the mistakes of the Spies we will enter Israel with Moshiach imminently!

ESSAY ONE

STARTING ON THE RIGHT FOOT

There is a spiritual principle that our success in a holy endeavor is usually determined by the direction we set forth for ourselves at the very outset.

When our original thought is positive and holy it is likely that we will succeed in reaching our destination—the Promised Land.

ESSAY ONE

STARTING ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Spies and Challah

One of the most intriguing narratives of the Torah takes place in this week's parsha. Moses, at the request of the Jewish people, sent twelve spies to scout the Land of Cana'an. Moses personally selected one representative for each tribe. Ten of the twelve spies returned with a slanderous report about the Land of Israel and succeeded in convincing the people that they would not be able to conquer the land.

Only Joshua and Caleb remained faithful to G-d and Moses and asserted that they will succeed in conquering the land.

As a punishment for their lack of faith, G-d told the Jewish nation that they would not live to enter the Promised Land that they scorned; only their children would enter it.

Soon after the narrative concerning the spies, the Torah discusses the law concerning Challah, which involves the separation of a piece of dough from the rest of the batter

and to be given to a Kohain-Priest. This commandment was to take effect as soon as they enter the Promised Land.

At first glance, there seems to be no direct relationship between these two themes: the spies debacle and the commandment to separate Challah.

What connection is there between the Mitzvah of giving Challah and the story of the spies?

How Not to Go Down the Same Wrong Road

The following is based on an adapted from a commentary by R. Yisroel of Chortkov, one of the great Chassidic Masters.

When the young generation saw how their parents and elders forfeited their share in the Promised Land, this made them give some serious thought to their own future.

Surely, they thought, their parents were promised that they would have a glorious future upon their liberation from slavery, and particularly after they received the Torah at Sinai when they were told that they were a chosen people. And despite all of that, they suffered this terrible fate that they would have to wander the desert until their deaths, never to see the fulfillment of the many promises G-d made to them.

Similarly, many of the members of the new generation surely reflected, what guarantee will they have that they will fare any better than their forebears. Perhaps, things will go downhill for them as well. It was not outside the realm of possibility that they too will do something foolish, and G-d's promise would not materialize, just as the promise to their parents was frustrated by their rebellious behavior.

To allay their fear, G-d instructed them concerning the Mitzvah of separating a piece of dough before it is baked and that it ought to be given to the Kohanim, G-d's servants. G-d also informed them that the observance of this Mitzvah will commence as soon as they enter the land; they will not have to wait until the land was conquered and settled.

How did these two details address their concerns?

It's Not about You

The reason the spies so degenerated despite the fact that that they were chosen by Moses was because their initial thoughts at being chosen to scout the land was one of arrogance. After all, they must of have thought to themselves, "If Moses chose us, we must be considered to be real mavens, true intellectuals and trusted leaders, whose opinions were even valued by Moses and G-d." Their

journey and mission was no longer about how best to lead the Jewish nation to the Promised Land; it was now all about them. They were now bent on demonstrating how good was **their** judgment and how astute were **their** observations and how solid **their** conclusions.

What the spies were thinking was a reflection of the mindset of the entire nation. When they approached Moses and asked him to send spies to scout the land it began with the wrong emphasis and intention. Rather than saying to Moses, "we are ready to go to the Promised land because that was the premise of our liberation and our receiving of the Torah, so let us not tarry," their initial approach was one of skepticism and doubt. They wanted to be assured that the land was conquerable and habitable.

In both cases—that of the spies and of the nation—the initial approach was flawed.

To be sure, they had free choice to regain their bearings, nevertheless as they started to slide down the slippery slope the odds for that to happen was becoming increasingly less likely.

This is so because there is a spiritual principle that our journey and success in a holy endeavor is usually determined by the direction we set forth for ourselves at the very outset. When our original thought is positive and holy it is likely that we will succeed in reaching our

destination—the Promised Land. When, however, the original plan is flawed and off course, it is more likely to be aborted.

Setting the Tone

This principle has been beautifully articulated by the great Chassidic leader (and successor to the founder of the Chassidic movement, the Ba'al Shem Tov), Rabbi Dovber, known as the Magid of Mezeritch, in a retranslation of several verses in Psalm 63:

> "O G-d you are my Almighty, I seek you! My soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you. In a desolate and dry land without water, so to see you in the Sanctuary, to behold our might and glory."

The Magid's ingenious retranslation of the above verse yields the following:

> O G-d, if you are my G-d as soon as I awaken in the morning [if my first thought as I awaken is "You are my G-d"], and my soul and flesh [begin the day] with thirst and longing for a relationship with You, then even when I am in a desolate and dry land without water [even when I am later involved in mundane physical matters and material pursuits that are devoid of spiritual vitality], nevertheless, I shall

> be imbued with a holy desire to see You; [I will not lose my bearings and will remain steadfastly loyal to you because my original thought upon awakening was tied to You].

In other words, our spiritual fortune is directly related to the way we begin our day, week, month, year or any other beginnings in our lives.

A Mitzvah without Delay

We can now understand why the Torah follows the spies narrative with the commandment to separate Challah:

To allay the fears of the new generation that they too could suffer the fate of their elders, G-d instructed them that immediately upon their entry into the Promised Land they would be given a special Mitzvah. Their first act upon arrival will be one that affirmed: "You are my G-d!" Indeed, the underlying rationale for giving the separated dough to the Kohain, G-d's servant is to underscore that we and everything we possess is G-d's.

Moreover, the very nature of the Mitzvah of Challah that it is to be taken from the first of the dough, underscores the idea that the beginning is crucial.

Indeed, a Chassidic translation of the words "the beginning of your dough you shall give to G-d" has been translated

alternatively as: "the first thing upon arising from bed (in Hebrew the word "*arisoseichem*" has a dual meaning: "your dough" and "your bed.") shall be given to G-d."

The Mitzvah of Challah, to be observed immediate upon their arrival, was therefore the response to the young generation. It conveyed the message to them: Insure that your initial thoughts be pure and holy, and the rest of the journey will go smoothly. Your chances at success will be greatly enhanced.

The Relevance to Our Generation

The aforementioned teaching of the Magid has special relevance to modern times. We are at the tail end of the journey to the Messianic Age when all of the Jewish people will return to the Promised Land. And although we have been promised that "no one will be left behind this time around," unlike our ancestors in the desert, nevertheless, the trip to our final destination can be a smooth one or fraught with many obstacles.

How can we protect ourselves and ensure that we reach our goal without forthwith and without any travail?

When we start our day, week, month, year and other periods of our lives, with positive thoughts about Moshiach and that we want him now. This will facilitate that the rest

of these periods will be devoted towards making the Messianic promise an imminent and smooth reality.

ESSAY TWO

HUMBLE SPIES

We are living in an age obsessively preoccupied with self-esteem.

Our problems will overwhelm us when we fail to grasp that self-esteem must be replaced with G-d esteem.

We are the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption, chosen by G-d to lead the way into this miraculous Age.

We must not lose our confidence in victory over the forces of exile.

ESSAY TWO

HUMBLE SPIES

Spiritual Rebellion

One of the most difficult stories in the Torah to comprehend concerns the spies handpicked by Moses to scout the land of Cana'an. Ten of the 12 spies gave a horribly slanderous report upon their return. Their negative depiction of the land caused nearly the entire male population of Jews to cry and spurn the gift of the Land of Desire that G-d had promised them. As a consequence of their rebellion, the spies died in a plague and the rest of the Jewish community, aged 20 and older, were destined to die in the desert while the conquest of the land was delayed for almost 40 years.

Commentators have grappled with this enigmatic episode. How could such righteous people have turned so dramatically against Moses and G-d?

Joshua's Humility: A Stumbling Block

Another enigmatic detail according to Rashi is that Moses changed Joshua's name specifically to fortify him with the strength not to be swayed by the conspiracy of the spies. Why would Moses single out Joshua for this prayer?

Targum Yonason ben Uziel explains that when Moses saw Joshua's humility he prayed for him. Why would humility be an obstacle for Joshua?

The simple explanation is that humble people are more likely to be followers and not leaders. Accordingly, Joshua's humility might cause him to suppress his own opinion and be receptive to what the other spies will say.

However, that is not an adequate answer. While a humble person does not promote himself, he does promote G-d's ideas. Certainly, Joshua, the most devoted disciple of Moses, would not deviate one iota from the mission to prepare the Jewish people for the conquest of the land. How could his humility get in the way?

Too Spiritual and Too Humble for the Land

To answer this question it is necessary to explore Chassidic approach to this entire episode first. The Spies' rebellion was not motivated by their lowliness. On the contrary, it was a product of their extremely high spiritual state. They

could not countenance living a primarily physical existence, which living in and inhabiting the land would entail. They preferred the purified spiritual environment of the desert, surrounded by clouds of glory and subsisting on heavenly Manna.

But, as Chassidus explains, the rationale went even deeper than that. The rebellious spies knew that the ultimate goal was for the Jewish people to exercise mastery over their physical and material existence. They were convinced that it would not be possible for them to achieve that objective. If their existence continued to be miraculous, as it was in the desert, there would be no problem in conquering the land in both the physical and spiritual senses of the word. However, the premise of the Jews' entry into the land of Cana'an was that they would do so following the natural order. How then, the spies reasoned, could we expect to transform the land into something spiritual and G-dly if we were to be constrained by, and subject to, the natural order of things?

The spies obviously underestimated the Divine spark that exists within every Jew and which enables him or her to gain mastery over nature. It was their misplaced humility that was the root cause of the rebellion. Moses was therefore understandably most concerned for Joshua, since he was by nature the most humble of the 12 spies. In his case, the danger was most acute that he would think it

impossible to uncover the Divine energy that would lead to a successful conquest of the land.

However, this answer does not adequately address why Joshua would think the Jewish **people** would be unable to conquer the land. After all, humble people always think that everyone else is superior to themselves. If Joshua couldn't do it himself, why couldn't the collective efforts of the entire Jewish people be able to do it?

Location, Location, Location

There is another approach to answering the question of why Moses was concerned for Joshua's humility. This approach is based on the 20th century work, *Knesses Yechezkal*.

The Talmud (*Berachos* 6a) discusses the importance of having a fixed place for one's prayers. The 18th century commentator R. Yechezkal Landow explains that when a person prays in a certain location it acquires a lingering spirituality that will provide additional support the next time he prays in that same spot.

Based on this premise it follows logically that when one commits a sin in a given location it becomes endowed with a trace of impurity, especially if that place is used repeatedly for the commission of a sin. This lingering

impurity can cause other unsuspecting people to be more vulnerable if they should chance upon the place.

This explains the statement in Ethics of the Fathers:

> "If two people are sitting together and do not discuss words of Torah, it is a place of scorners."

Some commentators interpret this statement in a novel way: The fact that two Jews, who were otherwise steeped in Torah study, failed to do so in that location is a sign that a group of scorners previously sat in that place. They defiled and degraded that location, thereby having a deleterious effect on these two individuals by making them less likely to say words of Torah.

This concept can serve as another way of understanding the role of the spies. The Land of Cana'an was known for the depravity of its inhabitants prior to the conquest. Such extensive impurity so pervaded the landscape that it would be most difficult, if not impossible, for the Jewish nation to conquer the land and transform it into a Holy Land. The odds were stacked against their succeeding in this endeavor.

To "soften the turf" and remove the effects of the moral depravity of the Canaanites, Moses sent the spies, who were righteous, moral and spiritually sophisticated scouts. Their task was to purify the air in preparation for the conquest by the remainder of the Jewish people.

The spies, however, were led astray by their lack of self-confidence. Although they were generally aware of the depraved nature of the land, which they obviously had to have heard about from Moses, one cannot compare the power of seeing something to the more attenuated impact of just hearing about it. After being confronted with the ugly reality of the land's depravity and contamination they were convinced that they could not change it for the better. They feared it would prove morally fatal to the Jewish people.

Moses' great concern was for his trusted disciple Joshua, precisely because of the latter's deep humility. Moses recognized that there is a fine line between the humility that makes a person receptive to all that is positive and the unwarranted underestimation of one's own spiritual powers. Moses prayed specifically for Joshua because none of the other spies were as distinguished by their humility as Joshua.

Whose Power is it?

At this point another question can be raised: if the other spies did not suffer from an excess of humility why did they think they could not execute their mission of preparing the land for the conquest? Why couldn't they

endow the land with purity and holiness, which they obviously possessed in abundant measure?

The answer is that the mindset of believing that one's own credentials and prowess qualify one for a mission can be a most destructive force and lead to the very undoing of the mission. To be sure, people sent on a mission by Moses then, or by the Moses of our own generation now, are chosen because they have the G-d given talents to carry out that particular mission. However, success is only guaranteed when they realize that the power they bring to their task is derived from the power of Moses, the leader of their generation.

The spies, tragically, began to believe in themselves. They forgot that their power and spirituality alone would not pave the way for the conquest. It was Moses' inspiration and G-dly energy that empowered them in their mission. When they saw the formidable and daunting challenge of the land's degradation with their own eyes, it hit them hard and they began to doubt their ability to succeed. Had they remained connected to Moses and his spiritual power, they would not have lost their self-respect and determination to triumph in their task.

Whose Esteem?

We are living in an age obsessively preoccupied with self-esteem. And yet we see so many people who fall apart when confronted by a challenge. The problems will overwhelm us when we fail to grasp that self-esteem must be replaced with G-d esteem. We are the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption, chosen by G-d to lead the way into this miraculous Age. We must not lose our confidence in victory over the forces of exile.

How do we develop this confidence when we look around the world and see so much strife and negativity?

The answer, again, is that we have been chosen by G-d to be the emissaries of the Moshiach of our generation, just as the spies were chosen by their Moses. He is with us in our exile, but will imminently take us out of it. Now when we confront all the obstacles we can be confident that we will surmount them because we go with the power of Moshiach.

Lest we use misplaced humility to say that we are not worthy or that we are incapable of transforming the world into a Messianic utopia, the response must be that we are "simply" agents of Moshiach. Even one additional positive act, word or even thought on our part, when suffused with our awareness of the identity of the one who sent us, can

tip the supernal scales for the good and bring salvation to the entire world.

ESSAY THREE

THREE FORMS OF GRATITUDE

Even a cursory overview of Jewish history will demonstrate how we owe our very existence to special Divine Providence.

A more astute observer of Jewish history will see how every bit of sustenance is a direct blessing from G-d.

But even when we act like spoiled children and demand the frivolous, G-d still grants us our request.

We must be grateful for everything including the luxuries that we enjoy.

ESSAY THREE

THREE FORMS OF GRATITUDE

Caleb's Arguments

Moses sent twelve spies to prepare the Jewish people for their entry into the Promised Land of Israel. Ten of those spies returned with a slanderous report about Israel and drew the conclusion that it would be impossible for the Jewish nation to conquer the Promised land. Two of the twelve spies, however, Caleb and Joshua, remained faithful to Moses and tried to convince the people that they would be successful in conquering the land.

In this week's Parsha, the Torah recounts how Caleb tried to persuade the people that Moses was only interested in their good. Rashi, quoting the Talmud, supplements the Torah's account by stating that Caleb highlighted three of Moses accomplishments to help mollify their concern about Moses' motives leading them into the Promised land.

(a) Moses split the sea. (b) He brought down the Manna. (c) He provided them with quail.

Commentators wonder what Caleb had in mind when he reminded them of the quails. Indeed, the end result of the quails' episode was that the Jewish people who craved for them and complained bitterly to Moses were eventually struck down by G-d. Mention of the quails could hardly pacify those who claimed that the conquest of the Promised Land would end in disaster.

What have You Done for Me recently?

To understand the reason for Caleb highlighting these three events — splitting of the sea, the Manna and the quails — we can look at human nature vis-à-vis the trait of gratitude. One of the flaws of human nature is that even when someone is the recipient of another's kindness, one might still think, "What have you done for me recently?" And even when one provides the other with constant assistance, the beneficiary may still be ungrateful because they take the kindness for granted.

To impress upon them the need to be grateful to Moses for all that he had done for them, Caleb selected these three events, because they highlighted the fact that Moses was instrumental in providing the Jewish people with all three categories of kindness, for which they would be compelled to show appreciation. By splitting the sea for them and saving them from the pursuing Egyptians, Moses earned

their gratitude because he literally saved their lives.

To counter the likely response of the ingrates, "What had Moses done for them recently?" Caleb therefore introduced the Manna, which was a daily occurrence. True, the Manna was not as crucial for their very survival as the splitting of the sea was, because, as our Sages tell us, they could have survived on the livestock they possessed. They could also have purchased food from the merchants who traveled through the desert. Nevertheless Manna was a daily form of assistance and kindness that was generated by Moses, for which they ought to be grateful.

But, Manna had its drawback. It became a predictable part of their lives and would likely be taken for granted. The fact that it was a necessity could have provoked the opposite reaction, "What's the big deal? Moses had to give us food? When was the last time he gave something meaningful and exciting?"

Caleb, therefore, cited the third example of how Moses provided them with something new and exciting; bordering on the frivolous. Indeed, it was rather audacious on their part to demand the quail. And notwithstanding the impetuous and frivolous nature of their demand, Moses still interceded with G-d to give it to them. Moses thus saved their lives, provided them with continual sustenance and even gave them a treat that was above and beyond

anything they really needed and had a right to demand.

If there is any lesson to learn from the above, it is the need to express gratitude for each of the three modes of Divine blessing that we have received from G-d and continue to be the beneficiaries of.

Three Modes of Divine Blessing

First, even a cursory overview of Jewish history will demonstrate how we owe our very existence to the special Divine Providence that is analogous to the splitting of the sea.

A more astute observer of Jewish history will see the "Manna effect" in our daily lives; how actually every bit of sustenance is a direct blessing from G-d.

What is perhaps most inspiring to some is that even when we act like spoiled children and demand the frivolous, such as the quail, G-d still grants us our request. We must be grateful for the luxuries that we enjoy.

The Thanksgiving Offering

Our Sages say that when Moshiach comes the most "popular" sacrifice will be the thanksgiving one. Each and every one of us will then express his/her heartfelt

appreciation for all of the good of the past. From Caleb's manner of praising Moses we learn that it does not suffice to be partially appreciative. It is imperative that we express gratitude for all the different aspects of G-d's benevolence.

ESSAY FOUR

MINION OR MINYAN

The *minyan* was not conceived of as an institution for saints, rather a medium for even deficient individuals to uplift themselves by joining a *minyan*, whose collective nature is far greater than the sum of its parts – it is a reflection of the collective Jewish community.

ESSAY FOUR

MINION OR MINYAN

Webster's Translation

Webster's Dictionary translates the word "minion": 1. A servile follower or subordinate of a person in power. 2. Any favored or highly regarded person.

The first translation, suggesting inferiority, and the second suggesting superiority, parallel – by Divine providence – the two connotations of the Hebrew concept of the *minyan*.

The *minyan*, according to Halacha (Jewish law) is a quorum of ten men needed for communal prayer. Without a *minyan*, many of the most important prayers, such as *kaddish* and *kedushah*, cannot be recited.

The Source of the Minyan

Oddly enough, the source for ten being the required number for a *minyan* is from the description of the ten

rogue spies sent by Moses to scout the Land of Cana'an in our parsha.

It is remarkable that the law as to what constitutes a *minyan*, the forum needed to invoke the holiest prayers, is derived from the evil spies. Why didn't the Torah find a more suitable collection of individuals from whom to establish the law of a *minyan*?

One basic answer to this question is that by selecting the spies as the source of the law of a *minyan*, the Torah wishes to instruct us that even a Jew who has strayed from the path of Torah can still be counted in a *minyan*. As the Talmud states: "A Jew, even though he has sinned, is still a Jew."

Implicit in this approach is the notion that to be counted in a *minyan* is not necessarily an indication of one's high status within the framework of Judaism – even a rogue can be included. The *minyan* was not conceived of as an institution for saints, rather a medium for even deficient individuals to uplift themselves by joining a *minyan*, whose collective nature is far greater than the sum of its parts – it is a reflection of the collective Jewish community.

Just as being included in a *minyan* is far from a sign of superiority, it is likewise not necessarily a sign of inferiority to be excluded from a *minyan*. For example, the exemption of women from a *minyan* is not – G-d forbid – an

expression of lower status. On the contrary, because women are of a higher spiritual makeup, they do not need the external support provided by the minyan.

Indeed, in many Chassidic communities, the most spiritual people would frequently endeavor to pray without a *minyan.* They would spend many hours daily in profound meditative and introspective prayer, revealing their own spiritual potential without the assistance of the *minyan*. From this vantage point the *minyan* represents a subordinate and inferior level of spirituality.

Holy Spies?

On a deeper level, there is another paradoxical reason for the *minyan* originating with the ten evil spies; one that suggests the loftier nature of the spies and of the *minyan*.

Despite appearances, the spies were not your run of the mill rogues. Their sin was not the typical sin of one who wants to rebel against G-d. If they were so evil, why would Moses have selected them from among all of the Jewish people, to scout the Land of Cana'an?

Chassidus teaches us that the spies were very special people. They tried to dissuade the Jews from entering the Promised Land, not in spite of their greatness, but, because of it.

Since these ten spies were endowed with very lofty souls, they wanted nothing less than to remain in the insulated environment of the desert to devote themselves exclusively to spiritual pursuits. Settling the land of Cana'an meant that they would have to detach themselves from the spiritual utopia they enjoyed in the desert.

We can now appreciate why the very concept of a minyan is derived from these ten spies. While in the final analysis they were wrong in their resistance to entering the Promised Land, they were driven by a desire to rise above the world. This is the very function of the minyan to enable the one who prays to rise above the material constraints of life.

Their error, however, was that they failed to realize that the ultimate purpose of Judaism was not to remain in the embryonic environment of the desert, but rather to infuse the physical world with spirituality. Their involvement with the mundane affairs of conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel would not have detracted from their connection to G-d. To the contrary, their involvement with the action oriented Mitzvos would have greatly magnified their connection to G-d inasmuch as it would have facilitated the connection of the entire land to G-d as well.

To refine and sanctify **every** aspect of existence represents the very purpose of the Torah. This is the process that we

have been working at for over three thousand years. We are now at the point that the world is ready for the Messianic Age, at which time we will realize the fruit of our labor, and the entire world will experience the utter unity that exists between the physical and the spiritual.

The Internal Minyan

Just as there is a Minyan which consists of 10 individuals\, each and every Jew possesses 10 faculties, which are divided into three intellectual and seven emotional powers.

The ideal form of praying with a Minyan is to gather and harness all of our 10 faculties.

Howver, in Galus-exile, our ability to function of the highest spiritual intellectual level is compromised, so that the concept of a Minyan in its fullest sense is elusive.

The Ultimate Minyan

In the Messianic Age, we will therefore enjoy the ultimate Minyan.

According to one Midrashic source the harp in the Bais Hamikdash, which originally consisted of seven strands will have ten. (According to another Midrash it will be eight.)

In addition, the Messianic Age will introduce the Tenth

Song and the tenth Red Heifer.

Whereas today we are empowered to deal with our emotions of which there are seven, in the Messianic Age we will be equipped to handle all 10 of our faculties, including the intellectual ones. Hence we will have the ultimate Minyan.

ESSAY FIVE

DRAWING AN IMAGINARY LINE IN THE SAND

Exile and Redemption represent two mindsets.

Exile mentality creates dichotomies.

To be spiritual, the exile mindset requires separation from the world.

The Redemption mindset is one of unity.

The same G-d who is supernatural created the natural order as well.

ESSAY FIVE

DRAWING AN IMAGINARY LINE IN THE SAND

Too Powerful. For Whom?

One of the arguments the "Ten spies," who were sent by Moses to Ca'na'an to survey the land was that the inhabitants of the land were too powerful to be conquered. The precise expression they used was that the inhabitants of the land of Ca'na'an "were stronger than Him." According to Rashi they actually meant to say that the residents of Canaan were mightier than G-d!

The question that arise here is obvious. How could ten men hand-picked by Moses the greatest of all Jews, degenerate to the point of uttering such blasphemy? Moreover, how could they have forgotten the incredible miracles that G-d wrought when He took them out of Egypt? Could not the same G-d that brought the ten plagues, split the Red Sea, rained manna from heaven etc. also defeat the armies of the Canaan?

End of Age of Miracles

Chassidic thought explains that the spies were, in fact, sophisticated people. They knew that G-d could do anything He chose. No miracle is beyond G-d's capacity to perform.

But, they also believed that the age of miracles was going to end with their conquest of Canaan. In a sense, they were right. Before they entered the Promised Land, the miraculous Manna ceased. Moreover, the very objective of conquering Israel was to bring Torah "down" within the confines of the natural order, so that the mundane world would become imbued with G-d's presence.

They mistakenly thought that when G-d is in His supernatural mode, then there is no miracle too big for G-d. However, when G-d consented to send spies and was preparing the Jews for a major transition from the realm of the supernatural to the world of nature, the spies drew a philosophical line: In the desert where Jewish life was not subject to the laws of nature, they had faith in G-d's ability to perform miracles. But, once that line would be crossed by the Jews going into Israel, where they would not be receiving the manna from heaven, rather they would be tilling the soil, etc.; there the spies felt, G-d was constrained by the natural laws He set into motion.

Furthermore, Chassidic thought explains, their concern was

not only for the actual military conquest of the land. They were also concerned that their spiritual status would be destroyed. They felt that the materialistic preoccupations of the new land would overwhelm them. Had they remained in the desert where the material realm was weak and did not assert itself, they had the capacity to be spiritual. How can we be spiritual under the conditions of Canaan when they would be immersed in the material pursuits that go along with conquest and habitation of a new land?

No Artificial Divisions

The lesson for our times is that we often create an artificial division with respect to G-d. We frequently act as if we believed that G-d's ability to prevail did not extend to the normal, weekday, natural and physical reality.

Exile and Redemption parallel these two mindsets. The exile mentality creates dichotomies. To be spiritual, the exile mindset requires separation from the world.

The Redemption mindset is one of unity. The same G-d who is supernatural created the natural order as well. With the coming of Moshiach all of us will see how the supernatural and the natural are inseparable.

ESSAY SIX

TOLERANCE

As long as we are in exile, punctuated with and characterized by its imperfection, can tolerance be both a blessing and a curse.

The Messianic Age, however, is when all good will be unadulterated good, and our tolerance for others will only lead to the discovery of their inner goodness and holiness.

Once that is discovered, the good will prevail over the negative.

ESSAY SIX

TOLERANCE

Why was Joshua More Vulnerable than the Others?

At the request of the Jewish People, this week's Parsha, *Shlach*, recounts how Moses selected one leader from each of the twelve tribes and sent them to scout the Land of Canaan.

The narrative continues with the account of how ten of the twelve spies returned with a scandalous report of the Land. They also concluded that it would be futile to try to conquer it. This led to one of the most tragic consequences for that generation. For forty years, the Jews — who blindly accepted their negative account — were condemned to wander in the desert, never to see the Promised Land.

Before Moses sent these twelve spies, he renamed his beloved disciple and eventual successor from his original name, *Hoshea*, to Joshua. Moses added the letter *yud* as a prefix to his name, which now translated as "May G-d save you." By doing this, Moses was beseeching G-d to save Joshua from the conspiracy of the spies.

The question has been raised. If Moses was fearful fear that the other spies would stray from their mission, why did he only pray for Joshua? Why was Joshua more vulnerable than the other eleven spies?

Joshua's Humility

Targum Yonasan, a Talmudic era Aramaic translation of the Torah, provides us with one answer:

> "When Moses saw the humility of Joshua, he prayed for him."

This answer, however, just begs a new question. What does humility have to do with being swayed by the other spies? One can argue that, on the contrary, it is arrogance and an independent mind that can easily sway one to go against G-d's will. A humble person, by contrast, is much more submissive and can withstand the pressure to reject G-d's will. Why then, should Moses have been concerned for his faithful and humble student Joshua?

Humility or Tolerance

In truth, the Hebrew word for humility, *anava,* can actually be translated two ways: Humility or tolerance. Hillel, the great Sage, was described as a person who exhibited unusual levels of patience and tolerance. This was reflected

in his acceptance of a would-be convert who demanded being taught the whole Torah while standing on one foot. While Shammai, Hillel's colleague, chased him out of his house, Hillel, was tolerant and accepted him as a convert.

On the surface it seems strange that Hillel would accept a person who ridiculed Judaism, by making the preposterous demand that he should be taught all of it on one foot. Why did Hillel accept him?

The answer is that Hillel was able to see beneath the surface. He saw that underlying the uncouth and irreverent demand, that he be taught all of Judaism standing on one foot, was a sincere desire to embrace all of Judaism.

Hillel's tolerance was not a relaxation of the standards of conversion. It was rather his ability to dig beneath the surface of a person's crassness to find their positive energy. With this form of tolerance, coupled with love and patience, one can help others cultivate their inner goodness and sincerity.

Both Shammai's and Hillel's approach, however, can lead to certain unintended, but negative side effects. Shammai's stern approach can "turn-off" those who are sincere, but because of their lack of sophistication, might have expressed themselves poorly.

Conversely, Hillel's tolerant approach — if adopted by one who is not properly guided — can cause people to lose

respect for the standards of Judaism and tolerate everything.

This is why Moses was concerned with Joshua's *anava*. His *anava* (read: tolerance) might cause him to not summarily dismiss the conspiracy of the other spies as evil. Perhaps, he might reason, they had a deeper motive that was really positive. Moses was thus concerned that Joshua would bend over backwards to justify and defend the other spies, which could have led to disastrous results. Only Divine assistance could provide Joshua with the ability to "temper" his tolerance and not be influenced by them.

No Side Effects

Only when Moshiach will come, will we be able to exhibit the tolerance of Hillel, without any negative side effects. As long as we are in exile, punctuated with and characterized by its imperfection, can tolerance be both a blessing and a curse. The Messianic Age, however, is when all good will be unadulterated good, and our tolerance for others will only lead to the discovery of their inner goodness and holiness. Once that is discovered, the good will prevail over the negative. As we wait for Moshiach, we must increase our efforts at exposing the good in everyone, but taking the necessary precautions not to lend support and comfort to the forces of evil that still exist. We must embrace

tolerance, but simultaneously firmly disavow the breakdown of moral and spiritual standards.

ESSAY SEVEN

SINCERELY WANTING MOSHIACH

G-d prefers and demands compliance with His will over courageous actions.

ESSAY SEVEN

SINCERELY WANTING MOSHIACH

The Spies

The saga of the newly liberated Jewish people was punctuated with missteps and regression. One such a pivotal event that kept the fledgling nation in the desert for 40 years was the incident of the spies recounted in this week's parsha.

The Jews approached Moses and demanded of him to send spies to scout the land of Canaan they were about to conquer. When Moses consulted with G-d, He did not authorize this mission. However, He did allow Moses to use his own discretion in this matter. Moses acceded to their request and sent 12 spies, one for each tribe.

Tragically, 10 of the 12 spies returned with a slanderous report of the land and influenced the entire nation to cry at the prospects of having to leave the security of their desert existence to enter a land that was fraught with great danger and that would be impossible to conquer.

Moses unleashed a powerful rejoinder to their complaints and criticized then harshly. Moses told them that they would all die in the desert and none of those over the age of 20 would live to see the Promised Land.

Immediately after delivering his sharp words of rebuke a group of Jews—known as the *Ma'apilim*, had a change of heart and offered to go up and conquer the land. Moses urged them not to do it for G-d was now not with them. They did not listen to Moses and they made an attempt to go to the Land of Israel and they were wiped out by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

Heroes or Villains?

The question is asked why they deserved such a fate. These *Ma'apilim* appeared to be rather courageous and dedicated to G-d. They were committed to reverse the rebellious rejection of the Land of Israel by their brethren and were willing to put their lives on the line to conquer the land. Wouldn't it follow that their desire to risk their lives constituted a powerful form of Teshuvah-repentance. Moreover, the Jerusalem Talmud refers to them as martyrs and Chassidim—pious ones for their desire to go up and conquer the land notwithstanding the great risk. Why then was their repentance not accepted by G-d?

The simple answer is that G-d prefers and demands compliance with His will over courageous actions even when those actions are propelled by a desire to do Teshuvah and rectify their previous rebelliousness.

While dying for a cause is a sign of incredible passion for that cause, it is not necessarily a sign of selfless devotion to G-d. It may actually be a senseless act of suicide or may even derive from a desire to perform a heroic act as an expression of one's ego. How does one know if the pursuit of martyrdom is a selfless act of devotion? One way of determining the source of one's martyrdom is to ascertain whether it is consistent with G-d's will. To die in G-d's name when He asks us to live to serve Him demonstrates that this desire, although a heroic and passionately zealous act, does not derive from one's total devotion to G-d.

Hence, when Moses conveyed G-d's message to them that they were not to attempt going to the Land of Israel at that time; their challenge was to control both their passion for the Land and their desire to rectify their earlier rebellion. The highest form of repentance for them would have been to reluctantly remain in the desert together with their leader Moses and the rest of the Jewish nation who were not destined to see the land.

"G-d said that we sinned."

Another answer, ascribed to the Ba'al Shem Tov, is given as to why their desire to conquer the land was an improper decision:

If we examine the words they used to express their desire to repent we will find them instructive as to their true sentiments. They said: "We're ready to go up to the place which G-d spoke about for we have sinned." The original Hebrew allows for a modified rendition: "We're ready to go up to the place, because G-d has said that we have sinned." In this rendition, they did not say, "...for we have sinned," rather, "**G-d said** that we had sinned."

Why did they emphasize that G-d said that they had sinned?" The Ba'al Shem Tov answers that by putting the onus on G-d they were not ready to acknowledge on their own that they did in fact sin. To be sure, they were not denying their guilt. Rather their acceptance of the reality that it was a sin was based solely on G-d saying so not because they recognized it on their own.

This approach to Teshuvah does not suffice. For Teshuvah in its highest form implies that the person has fundamentally changed. If one acknowledges his mistake only because someone else tells him that it was a mistake, we must conclude that that individual has not fundamentally changed.

For example, if a person committed theft but never recognized it was wrong on his own; that individual cannot claim to have been rehabilitated even if he accepts the assessment of others that it was wrong. For Teshuvah to be complete and enduring one must take full responsibility.

Thus, the *Ma'apilim* might have been motivated to go up to conquer the land; it was not deemed sufficient Teshuvah because they did not independently recognize the error of their ways.

"Ad Masai-How Much Longer" from the Heart

The above approach was echoed by the Rebbe in his historic talk (28th of Nissan 5751) when he declared that he had done everything in his power to get us to demand the Redemption. But alas, when we shouted "Ad masai-How much longer," we did so only because we were told to do it. We did it out of a sense of obligation and not out of our contempt for, and desperation at being in, exile. We were not disgusted with exile and its negative effects on us. Thus our desire to ask G-d to take us out of exile was not really our own sincere desire based on a conclusion that we arrived at ourselves. If we hadn't been told to plead with G-d and demand an end of exile, we could have countenanced staying in exile much longer. This, the Rebbe stated was a sign that we were still in our own internal exile.

To get out of exile, we have to get the exile out of us.

Two Avenues

One could perhaps add a third dimension that was missing in the attempts of the "*Ma'apilim* that carries a lesson for us in our attempts at going up to conquer the land; i.e., the Messianic Age. When we consider the motivation for us to want Redemption, there are actually two sincere motivating forces:

The first is the recognition of the pain, suffering and the prevalence of evil in our midst which results from being in Galus. The advantage of this approach is that it can easily be instilled within us. However, although sincere and totally legitimate, it is not the ultimate reason we should desire Redemption through the hands of Moshiach.

The second reason we should want and demand Redemption is not the desire to escape the evils of exile but the desire for the positive spiritual experience of the Geulah-Redemption. The Messianic Age is the age when G-d's presence will pervade the entire world bringing the world to its intended purpose. There can be no greater joy.

The *Ma'apilim*, in addition to their lack of sincerity to correct their errant ways, were also lacking in this regard as well. When they adamantly refused to listen to Moses'

command to them not to go up, the Torah states that Moses and the Ark did not go with them.

Why does the Torah have to mention that fact? Isn't it self-understood that they went on their own so that Moses and the Ark obviously did not go with them?

The answer is that the fact that they were willing to go on their own to the Land of Israel without Moses or the Ark was proof that they did not truly treasure going to Israel. If going to Israel was merely getting away from the desert experience, then their going up would have been adequate. However, going to Israel has value primarily because it is the Land where G-d's presence is more pronounced and revealed. How then would it make sense to go without Moses the holiest Jew who channeled G-d's presence to the Jewish people? What logic was there in going to the Holy Land without the Ark, which was the very instrument through which G-d's expressed His infinite presence?

The lesson for the present day and age is therefore twofold:

First, we must recognize that exile is intolerable and cry out Ad masai not only because we were told to do so but because we have internalized the message. Our cry Ad masai comes from our gut because we recognize how objectionable exile is and we sincerely want out. We are no longer inured by the suffocating vapors of Galus.

Second, we must also focus on the positive reason for getting out of Galus. We should sincerely sing "We want Moshiach now!" We want to be in a place and time when G-d's presence is revealed. Thus the Messianic Age is not just independence and prosperity; it is the beginning of a new era of Divine revelation ushered in by the Moses of our generation—Moshiach through the medium of the rebuilt Holy Temple that will once again house the Holy Ark!

ESSAY EIGHT

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE BALL

Each and every one of us was chosen by G-d to perform a mission to refine and sanctify the world.

Our talents notwithstanding, we were chosen to represent the interests of G-d, Moses and the people that we were chosen to serve, not our own personal ones.

ESSAY EIGHT

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE BALL

Moses Idea, Not G-d's

Many explanations have been offered as to how ten of the twelve spies Moses sent to scout the Land of Israel could have sinned so egregiously. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the spies returned from their mission with a slanderous report about the Promised Land, thereby deterring the Jewish nation from their desire to continue on towards their divinely ordained destination.

One explanation is rooted in one Hebrew word (*lecha*-unto you) that the Torah employs in G-d's instruction to Moses about the scouting mission:

> "Send unto you people who will scout the Land of Cana'an. Commentators grapple with the word(s) "*lecha*-unto you."

Rashi comments that this was G-d's way of saying: "This is your idea; I do not endorse it."

Subservient to Moses

There can be another way of explaining the attribution of the mission to Moses as G-d's way of setting forth the condition for one's eligibility to be a proper spy: The people selected to this mission must be "unto you." They must be totally subservient to the leadership of Moses, never forgetting that they are not "independent contractors," but agents of their generation's leader, Moses.

To be sure, they were also chosen because of their intellectual capabilities, their conscientiousness, and their position in the Jewish community. But, all of those qualities meant nothing if they forgot who they were representing.

And this is where the ten spies went wrong. They reflected on the honor that was accorded to them, and turned the mission around as another stepping stone in the advancement of their careers. They forgot that they were sent by Moses (G-d's most devoted, humble and selfless servant) to represent him and the interests of G-d and the Jewish nation.

The lesson for us is obvious. Each and every one of us was chosen by G-d and His chosen leaders to perform a mission to refine and sanctify the world. It is also obvious that we are chosen because of the qualities we possess that enable us to be successful. But we must never forget that our talents notwithstanding, we were chosen to represent the

interests of G-d, Moses and the people that we were chosen to serve, not our own personal ones.

Interplay between Talents and Our Mission

Where does the error that the spies made originate?

It may be suggested that their downfall began with an erroneous understanding of the interplay between a person's talents and the G-d given mission they have in life.

One could imagine that G-d selects those who possess certain talents and potentials to fulfill a certain mission. In this scenario, the talents and the mission are two distinct things, which were brought together for a specific mission.

Upon deeper reflection we should realize that our talents and our mission are not two distinct matters. The very reason we have the talents and resources in the first place is so that we can fulfill the Divine mission.

In other words, when G-d sent (the Hebrew word for sending is the name and theme of this week's parsha-Shlach) our souls into this world, He sent it here for it to realize a specific goal. To facilitate the successful execution of the goal, He endowed our souls with the necessary talents.

Equipped with this attitude, we will never deviate from our mission, or squander our resources on matters that have nothing to do with the very purpose that we are here.

Mission Statement

Our mission, much like the mission of the spies then, is to prepare ourselves and the entire world for the final Redemption.

Our generation has also been endowed with unprecedented capabilities and resources because our generation is charged with the role of making the dream and hope of thousands of years become a tangible reality.

It is axiomatic in Judaism that G-d does not demand anything from a person they were not empowered to do. If our mission is to bring the Jewish people into the Promised Land with Moshiach, then we have the requisite resource to accomplish this daunting mission.

The fact that we, and only we, will have succeeded in bringing an end to Galus and ushering in the Age of Redemption suggests that our generation possesses unique and unprecedented capabilities.

This premise may not sit well with many who think that we can never match up with our forebears. Yet, it is we who will bring Moshiach and not our predecessors!

Our Generation's Uniqueness

Our generation is unique in many ways:

Among others, we have the collective experience and accumulated energy of all of our forebears.

We have the technology it takes to acquire and disseminate the eternal knowledge of Torah to the world.

We enjoy unprecedented prosperity and freedom to translate our aspirations into reality.

We have unfettered access to our Holy Land.

Our generation had, and continues to be blessed with, the leadership, foresight, and inspiration of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who has alerted us to our unique status as "the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption," so that we can translate the latter part of that declaration into reality.

And the Rebbe also taught us that our generation is unique because it has demonstrated that it can keep its Jewish identity alive even in the most difficult circumstances.

When a survivor of the Holocaust marries, starts a business, establishes a synagogue and Jewish school, and keeps Judaism alive for the next generation; that is unique.

When a Jew from the former Soviet Union, who was never allowed a formal Jewish education, agrees to be circumcised as an adult; that is unique.

When an American Jew from an assimilated family seeks his or her roots and starts to do one Mitzvah at a time; that is unique.

The lesson of this week's parsha is to never forget that we were given all of these incredible resources so that we should utilize them to help prepare ourselves and the entire world for the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Age of Redemption.

ESSAY NINE

HEALTHY MILK AND HONEY

Truth can be a formidable and destructive weapon when it is harnessed to untruths.

Throughout Jewish history, the greatest threat to Jewish life came more from those who invoked Torah in their deviation from it than from those who renounced Torah and erased it from their lexicon completely.

ESSAY NINE

HEALTHY MILK AND HONEY

Beginning with Truth

In this week's parsha the Torah recounts the episode of the spies that were sent to the Land of Israel to scout the land and return with a detailed report about all aspects of its populace, agriculture and its defenses.

They returned with a scurrilous report about the land; denouncing it as a land that cannot be conquered. The Jews cried that night and as a result those who over the age of twenty years and who participated in the mutiny were destined not to enter the Promised Land.

What was so powerful about the spies' presentation that persuaded and "brainwashed" a sophisticated people? This generation—to whom the Torah was given—is identified by our Sages as a "*dor de'ah*" a knowledgeable generation; a generation nurtured by overt miracles, and Manna from heaven, and who heard G-d speaking to them directly at Sinai. How could they be so easily convinced by these rebellious spies?

A partial answer to this question can be offered by Rashi's comment on the opening words of the report of the spies: "We came to the Land to which you sent us. It is flowing with milk and honey, and this is this fruit!"

The obvious question here is: If their intention was to slander the land, why did they praise it as a land of milk and honey?

In response to this question Rashi answers: "Any lie which does not begin by saying a bit of truth cannot be sustained in the end."

The intention of the spies was not to praise the Land of Israel but to denigrate it. However, if they would have begun with negative words their words would not have been taken seriously.

Truth is so powerful that it captivates the listener to the point that he or she is incapable of shaking off the lies that may follow.

Captive Audience

We now have a partial answer to the question, how the spies could so sway public opinion. They lied with the power of truth.

The lesson we derive from this is the power of truth to influence others. When a person sees sincerity and truth in

the words and tone of a speaker the listener will become receptive to his message. The challenge is to insure that the balance of the talk is also consistent with truth because the audience has become a "captive audience."

Truth can be a formidable and destructive weapon when it is harnessed to untruths. Throughout Jewish history, the greatest threat to Jewish life came more from those who invoked Torah in their deviation from it than from those who renounced Torah and erased it from their lexicon completely.

The Lie was the Truth... for the Spies

But upon deeper reflection Rashi's words seem to suggest that the lie is sustained if there is truth in the beginning. But that is hardly what happened in the spy saga. In the end the spies' lies were exposed for everyone to see. The spies died in a plague; the Jews who cried when they accepted the spies' report died in the desert before the age of sixty and when the Jews finally entered the Promised Land they saw the truth about the Land of Israel.

How can we then say that their lies were sustained in the end? Rashi should have stated, "Any lie which begins by saying a bit of truth will be believed." By stating "Any lie which does not begin by saying a bit of truth cannot be

sustained in the end," it implies that in the end the lies were sustained!

The answer is that in the final analysis, the spies' distortion of the truth was indeed sustained. Their lie was that the Land was unconquerable. That was true insofar as that generation was concerned. **They** could not conquer the land because, as Chassidus teaches, the generation of the spies belonged to the world of thought. They belonged in the desert. They could not translate their lofty spirituality into the world of action. They were products of the second day of creation where the division between the spiritual and physical took place. And they were locked into that dichotomy.

However, the ultimate truth emerged for those who entered the Promised Land. They witnessed how conquering the land was within reach and that there was no dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical. This perception of ultimate truth will be fully manifest in the Messianic Age at which time even those Jews who remained in the desert will arise and with Moses at their head enter the Promised Land (Midrash Rabbah, Chukas).

The Roots of Truth and Falsehood

In the beginning there was truth. The Torah's opening three words end with the letters that can be arranged to

spell the word *emes*, truth. The first day of creation is described by the Torah as *Yom Echad*, which means "a day of one," and not the "first day." Rashi explains that on this day—and only on this day—G-d was truly one because no sentient beings were in existence to "challenge" G-d's exclusivity. Angels were not created until the second day of creation.

And it is this truth that presided at the beginning of creation that enabled all of the falsehood to exist on subsequent days. Without the divine power of truth of day one there would be no potential for a multifarious world that began with day two. On day two there was division between the upper waters and the lower waters. This symbolizes the emergence of a world in which G-d's true existence is compromised to allow room for a world of falsehood. Without the truth in the beginning there can be no sustainable falsehood in the end.

Don't Say: Water, Water!

The Talmud (Chagigah 14b) relates the classic story of the four Sages who entered a spiritual orchard. Three of the four were affected adversely. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva—the only sage that emerged unscathed—stated to his colleagues upon entry to the orchard, "when you enter near the pure marble stones do not say 'water, water'

because it says, 'he that speaks falsehood shall not t be established before My eyes.'" What is the lie here? Rashi explains that the lie is that the marble stone is not really water."

The great Kabbalist, the Arizal explains, that the lie is the perception that there are two waters. This is a reference to the second day of creation when G-d separated between the upper waters and the lower waters. It is a lie to imagine that there is truly a dichotomy between the upper worlds and the lower worlds.

Tragically, one of the four—known as Acher—did perceive the division to be real and proceeded to deny G-d's unity.

Truth With Peace

The question can be asked, how could such a person allow himself to accept a lie? The answer is that in the beginning there was truth. When one is so absorbed with the truth of one G-d, and then suddenly he is thrust into a world of division—symbolized by the upper and lower waters separated on day two—it is difficult to reconcile the notion of unity with multiplicity. The result can be a tragic rejection of G-d.

Only Rabbi Akiva, the Talmud states, "entered in peace and left in peace." This means that Rabbi Akiva always

understood that the appearance of two dimensions was only that; an appearance of a duality. He was able to make peace between the two and see the oneness within the division. Rabbi Akiva fused his understanding of the truth of day one with the notion of shalom-peace. He did not see a conflict between unity and the apparent division between upper and lower spheres.

Healthy Milk and Honey

One can find another connection between the foregoing Talmudic narrative and the story of the spies:

The truthful aspect of the spies' report was that the Land of Israel was a land of milk and honey. Milk and honey in the foregoing passage in the Talmud alludes to the spiritual orchard that the four sages entered.

When we indulge in the mystical teachings of the Torah—which capture the ultimate truth of G-d's existence and unity and is therefore characterized as the "wisdom of truth"—there exists the potential for danger that the unity of the beginning will be contradicted by the division of day two. The danger of the "milk and honey" of Torah is eliminated when it is augmented with Rabbi Akiva's approach of peace—the ability to make peace between the upper and lower spheres of existence so that they don't contradict G-d's unity.

With the advent of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Chassidic movement, the "milk and honey" of Torah was introduced to the world in ways that the "truth at the beginning" of day one is not compromised by the false divisions. This is why Moshiach told the Ba'al Shem Tov (in the famous spiritual soul experience the Baal Shem Tov had), that he would come when "your teachings will spread to the far reaches of the world." These teachings—especially as they have been articulated by the Rebbe's of Chabad, particularly our Rebbe—constitute the fusion of the truth of "milk and honey" with the peace oriented dynamic of Rabbi Akiva.

What the spies were lacking was the combination of truth with peace. They had the truth but not the peace. Therefore, their truth could not endure. Our generation—the last of exile—will rectify the generation of the desert and we will enter into the Promised Land to enjoy its milk and honey (truth) synthesized with peace, with the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the **true** and **complete** (*shleima* cognate to the world **shalom,** peace) Redemption.

ESSAY TEN

MILK FOR DIAMONDS OR DIAMONDS FOR MILK

There are treasures that can be found in great abundance in our life's experience. These are the moments spent in Torah study, performance of a Mitzvah or heartfelt prayer.

Out of necessity we take time away from our precious pursuits to earn money, build a house, clothe our families, etc., just so we have a few quality moments with our family, our community and our G-d.

ESSAY TEN

MILK FOR DIAMONDS OR DIAMONDS FOR MILK

The Land of Israel

Israel, the land, is the theme of this week's parsha.

The parsha begins with how Moses, at the behest of the Jewish people, send 12 spies to scout the land. The balance of the parsha is how the spies returned with a slanderous report about this cherished and promised land that was destined for the people of Israel.

One of the points made frequently by our Sages was that "the Land of Israel was 'tailor made' for the Jewish people."

Indeed, this land had already been given to them hundreds of years before they actually conquered it. At the "Covenant between the Pieces," Abraham was promised this land for his children. This promise was then repeated to Isaac, and then again, even more forcefully, to Jacob, who was renamed Israel and for whom the land was named.

Why the Land of Canaan?

In light of all this, it would have been expected that G-d would refer to this land with its proper and ideal name: the Land of **Israel**. Yet at the very beginning of this week's parsha, the Torah states:

> "And G-d spoke to Moses saying: "Send spies to scout the land of Canaan."

Of all names, G-d chose to refer to this exalted land by the name of one of the seven tribes that inhabitant the land, but was known for its extreme immorality. Many times the Torah itself states how the Canaanite tribe reached the very nadir of depravity.

Why then did G-d choose to refer to this land as the "Land of **Canaan?**" Furthermore, there were six other tribes that inhabited the land. Why focus only on Canaan?

The Merchant Land

The answer lies in the use of the word Canaan elsewhere in the Torah. In the Book of Genesis, the word Canaan actually is used to mean a merchant. Presumably, at one point the Canaanite people were known as merchants and the name Canaan stuck to them.

To better understand the relationship of a merchant to the Promised Land, a parable has been cited by the great

nineteenth century sage, known as the *Chasam Sofer*:

A man who failed at everything, decided to travel to a remote region to find diamonds there. Sure enough, after many arduous months of travel, he finally reached the paradise he had sought. Indeed, it was easier than he could have ever imagined. The streets were virtually lined with diamonds, and all it took was the effort to stoop down and pick them up. This he did, and filled several wagons with these precious jewels. When he got hungry and sought to purchase some food, he soon realized that even a cup of milk cost several hundred diamonds.

"Wow," he thought to himself. "If one cup of milk is worth hundreds of diamonds, why bring wagon loads of diamonds home, if I could just bring home a few gallons of milk."

Needless to say, when he returned with his "treasure," he quickly realized that he had exchanged priceless treasures for something of no value whatsoever.

This hapless "merchant" failed in his business venture, because he couldn't appreciate what was the real treasure and what was transient.

Analogously, there are treasures that can be found in great abundance in our life's experience. These are the moments spent in Torah study, performance of a Mitzvah or heartfelt prayer. Out of necessity, however, we must devote much of our time to earn a living. We thus trade in our

diamonds for a cup of milk. We take time away from our precious pursuits to earn money, build a house, clothe ourselves and our families, pay taxes and all the other mundane activities, just so we have a few quality moments with our family, our community and our G-d.

However, we should never make the foolish error that that "merchant" made by thinking that the real treasure is the cup of milk, while the diamonds are merely a means to get the milk. It is, of course, the reverse. The diamonds can only be procured by staying alive and drinking the milk.

A good merchant-Canaanite, is one who knows what is the primary thing and what he needs to do to get it.

This then is what G-d had in mind when He told the spies to scout the Land of Canaan (read the "land of merchants"):

"By all means, get involved in the pursuit of material wealth. You may even spend most of your day on these matters. But, don't emulate the foolish merchant who then imagined that the real treasure was the milk and he threw away the diamonds. Scout the land, search for the inner meaning of all of the physical pursuits that you are involved with and realize that they are all means to the end of procuring the real treasure-the diamonds."

Discovering the Treasure

We are presently on the verge of discovering the greatest treasure of all times; the ultimate treasure. Moshiach's coming will usher in an age where all the genuine treasures of the world, including the diamonds embedded within our souls, will be revealed to us. Our way of preparing for this is by rearranging our priorities in life and trading in the "milk" for the "diamonds" and not the other way around.

ESSAY ELEVEN

BABYLONIAN AND JERUSALEM VERSIONS OF TRUTH

Living as we do in exile, we must appreciate even the modest attempts that one makes to be sincere about his or her Judaism.

Once the light of truth shines through the darkness of exile, albeit even for the wrong reason, there is the hope that this light may eventually dispel that darkness.

ESSAY ELEVEN

BABYLONIAN AND JERUSALEM VERSIONS OF TRUTH

What were the Giants Thinking?

The spies sent by Moses returned from their scouting mission with slander on their tongue. They maligned the Land of Israel, suggesting that it was a hostile and unconquerable land.

To frighten the Jewish people, they referred to giants that inhabited the land. And in their colorful description of these giants the spies declared: "We appeared like grasshoppers in our eyes and that's how we were in their eyes."

The Talmud asks, how did they know what the giants thought about them?

The Talmud answers that they overheard them speak of the spies as little creatures.

It is interesting to note that the Jerusalem Talmud does not explain how the spies knew what was in the thoughts of the Canaanite giants. Rather, the Jerusalem Talmud

maintains, they fabricated this part of the story for dramatic effect.

According to the Babylonian Talmud, the spies seasoned some of their lies with truths, whereas, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, their words were all lies.

What is the crux of the truthfulness dispute between the Babylonian Talmud, which asserts that the spies were not lying about the giants' attitude, and the Jerusalem Talmud's assumption that they were indeed lying?

Torah Temimah understands the Babylonian Talmud's insistence that the spies overheard the giant's remarks and that they were telling the truth, is based on the spies' desire to be as truthful as possible so that their lies would be believed as well.

Indeed, this pattern is mentioned explicitly in reference to their praise of the quality of the produce of the land: "it is a land of milk and honey." The Babylonian Talmud explains that they deliberately told the truth about the produce to make their lies more believable. In the words of the Talmud (cited by Rashi) "If one wants to lie he should include words of truth."

However, the Jerusalem Talmud does not accept this tradition and claims that the truthful words of praise concerning the land were actually uttered only by the righteous spies, Joshua and Calev.

It seems that the Jerusalem Talmud, in contrast to the Babylonian Talmud, does not ascribe to the spies any measure of truthfulness even for the sake of making their false words more believable.

What, we may ask, is the underlying premise of these two divergent views concerning the honesty of the spies?

Accessories to a Mitzvah and Transgression: Two Approaches

One approach to this dispute can be traced to another dispute between the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds with respect to the role of the performance of a Mitzvah.

According to the Babylonian Talmud, one who builds a Sukkah does not need to recite the blessing required for the performance of a mitzvah until he actually dwells in the Sukkah during Sukkos. The act of building a Sukkah is not the ultimate mitzvah; it is merely an accessory to the mitzvah.

The Jerusalem Talmud maintains a different position. One does indeed recite the blessing on the Mitzvah of Sukkah when building the Sukkah.

One explanation of this dispute is that the Babylonian Talmud considers the act of building a Sukkah to be no more than the accessory to the Mitzvah. The Jerusalem

Talmud maintains that it is an indispensable part of the Mitzvah. Indeed, one cannot dwell in a Sukkah if it has not been built, so it must be an integral part of the Mitzvah, which warrants a blessing.

We may now understand why the Jerusalem Talmud is reluctant to value the truths told by the spies. Since the ostensible truths were accessories to subsequent lies, they too are considered to be an integral part of the web of lies and no credit can be given to them for truth-telling.

The Babylonian Talmud, however, allows bifurcation of the two parts of their report concerning the Land of Israel. The part that was truthful cannot be considered an accessory to their lies; it stands on its own two feet and is therefore judged to be truthful, notwithstanding the accompanying lies.

Emes = Consistent Truth

There is yet another way to understand the dispute between these two Talmudic traditions which will provide us with a lesson for our own times.

To better understand these divergent Talmudic views we must preface our discussion with the well-known teaching of the Jerusalem Talmud that word for truth in Hebrew (*emes*) is a composite of the first, middle and last letters of

the Hebrew Alphabet. This conveys a powerful lesson: truth can only characterized as such when it is consistent from the beginning through the middle to the end. If something breaks this chain of consistency at any point the statement under examination cannot be regarded as true, even if there is some truth in it.

Hence, the Jerusalem Talmud maintains that even if there was some truth in their statements it cannot be attributed to them because it was followed by untruths.

From the perspective of the Jerusalem Talmud, there is zero tolerance for even the slightest deviation from truth. That is why it maintains that the "truths" uttered by the evil spies cannot be characterized as truthful.

A Crack in the Wall of Darkness

The Babylonian Talmud, the Talmud of exile, takes a more nuanced view of truth. While untruths cannot be tolerated, we must give the liar some credit for any truth he or she utters, even if it is for the sake of making his or her lies more palatable. The Babylonian Talmud is not as categorical as the Jerusalem Talmud when it comes to The Truth.

The lesson for us, living as we do in exile, is that we must appreciate even the modest attempts that one makes to be

sincere about his or her Judaism. While the Babylonian Talmud certainly does not condone telling the truth to facilitate subsequent lies, it does not regard the truths themselves as lies. Once the light of truth shines through the darkness of exile, albeit even for the wrong reason, there is the hope that this light may eventually dispel that darkness.

To better understand the Babylonian Talmud's approach, we must understand how exile itself is the greatest lie. It obfuscates the Divine reality that suffuses every bit of creation. The fact that so many are unable to see the Divine in everything is the consequence of this great lie. While we are living in a false world it is no wonder that people can utter outright lies. When our entire view of reality is so skewed, how could we see anything truthfully? If one builds a structure on the premise that 2 + 2 = 5, how can that structure be valid? If our foundation in exile obscures the truth, how can we be honest about anything?

In truth (pun intended), no matter how deeply one is ensconced in the darkness of exile, G-d allows some of His G-dly light to penetrate the deepest of shadows. Any parting of the veil of darkness and obfuscation should be cultivated and nurtured, not denigrated or dismissed.

In more general terms, while it is true that life in exile is one great lie, G-d has given us the ability to access truth by

way of Torah study and Mitzvah observance. They represent the G-dly force that impinges on and puts a dent in our exile's obstruction of truth.

The strongest manifestation of the idea that the light of truth penetrates the darkness is the Babylonian Talmud itself. By their own admission, the Sages of the Babylonian Talmud refer to it as the Talmud of Darkness. In Hebrew, "Babylon" means "confused." However, the Babylonian Talmud represents the beacon of G-dly light that He has allowed to penetrate the darkness and confusion of exile. We must cherish every bit of that G-dly light.

This is the basis for the oft quoted statement of the Babylonian Talmud that one should always engage in the study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos, even if it is undertaken for ulterior motives. For from the ulterior motive, one will come to perform the Mitzvah for pure motives. In other words, when we allow the light (the Mitzvah) to shine through the darkness (ulterior motive) it will eventually dispel all of the darkness. (It is noteworthy that the Jerusalem Talmud takes a similar position, but omits the word "always." The Jerusalem Talmud seems to have adopted a more cautious view concerning the propriety of ulterior motives.)

Geulah Perspective of Truth

The Jerusalem Talmud looks at the world from an ideal Geulah-Redemptive perspective. It reveals that any truth that is not absolute and which therefore keeps us from the Promised Land, is just another mode of lie, by rigorous Geulah standards and definitions. The spies could therefore not be credited with saying something truthful even if, technically speaking, the words of praise they uttered about Israel were accurate. In the world of Geulah, the truth must be consistent and must lead inexorably to our arrival to the Promised Land. No vestige of Galus-tainted half-truths can be countenanced.

As many of these essays have stated, we are standing on the bridge between the dark and false world of Galus and the bright and truthful world of Geulah. We are therefore exposed to two diametrically opposite phenomena.

On one hand we see darkness, lies and pain. On the other, we are witness to unprecedented goodness, integrity, sincerity and consistency. If one may coin a phrase, we are living in the "Babylonian-Jerusalem Talmudic era," where both dynamics co-exist.

We must therefore uphold the Babylonian Talmud's approach and cherish every bit of light that pierces through the darkness and encourage every gesture of good, no matter how lacking it might be in consistency and

altruism. This will facilitate getting rid of the last vestiges of darkness that still prevails. At the same time, we must forcefully advocate the Jerusalem Talmud's pursuit of unsullied, unmitigated and uncompromising truth for the sake of truth, because we are so very close to that time when G-d's presence will be fully revealed throughout the entire world.

ESSAY TWELVE

HAVING IT ALL

It does not suffice to reach perfection by devoting ourselves to exclusive Torah study.

One can acquire total mastery of Torah knowledge—and yet not bring Moshiach. We must also recognize that all of the world must be integrated into our spiritual lives.

ESSAY TWELVE

HAVING IT ALL

Clue from Location

The main theme of this week's parsha is the saga of the 12 spies who were sent to scout the land of Cana'an, and who (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) returned with a slanderous report about it. This event was a major setback for the fledgling Jewish nation and delayed their entry into the Promised Land by almost forty years.

Much has been written about the spies and their intentions. What motivated them to turn against G-d, Moses and the Land of Israel?

One can find a clue that may shed light on this entire episode from the way the Torah—parenthetically—discusses the name of a location where they cut some of the fruits of the land to put on display for the Jewish people.

The Torah states the following:

> "They came to the valley of Eshkol and they cut a branch with a cluster of grapes and they carried it

> on double pole; and from the pomegranates and figs. That placed was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster (*eshkol*) the children of Israel cut from there."

A question has been raised as to why the place was named after the cluster of grapes and not after the pomegranates or figs that they took from there? And why does the Torah find it important to mention this entire rather insignificant detail at all?

The Human *Eshkol*

Upon deeper research and reflection we will discover that the word *eshkol* is laden with much symbolic meaning that will help us understand what was going on in the minds of the spies.

The Talmud speaks of the passing of two great sages, Rabbi Yosei of Tzreidah and Rabbi Yosi of Jerusalem. In reciting their praise, the Talmud says that when they died it marked the end of the era of the "*eshkolos*-clusters." The Talmud explains that this word is a composite of the three Hebrew words: "*ish she'hakol bo*," meaning "a person who has everything."

There are two interpretations as to what "a person who has everything" means. According to Rashi it refers to a scholar

whose knowledge is impeccable, devoid of any confusion or forgetfulness. In other words, it refers to one whose knowledge is complete. It says nothing, however, of the nature of the person who possesses that knowledge.

According to Maimonides, the "person who has everything" refers to a person who possesses all the desirable traits of scholarship and character. An "Eshkol" personality is thus one who combines all of the most desired traits; not just Torah knowledge.

When the spies lived in the desert they distinguished themselves with their ability to study Torah. There were no distractions because of their material needs were provided for them miraculously.

Thus, our Sages tell us that the Torah was given specifically to those who ate the Manna that descended from heaven. The implication of this statement is that only those who had absolutely no material needs and could devote all of their time and energy to the study of Torah can truly master it.

This also explains why the Torah was given in the desert rather than in the Holy Land of Israel. Only those whose lives were left undisturbed by all the distractions of everyday life that one encounters in both an urban and rural setting can be capable of absorbing Torah.

Is Israel conducive to Torah Study?

The spies thus reasoned that if they were chosen to scout the land it was because they had to gauge whether life in the Land of Israel would be conducive to undisturbed Torah study. In their minds, their mission was not so much about determining the ability to conquer the land or the strategy to use in doing so as much as it was about determining if the conquest will compromise their generation's mission to be the first unqualified recipients of Torah.

When they saw the degree to which it would become necessary to spend time and energy to conquer, settle and cultivate the land, they were convinced that their generation was, in fact, not the right one to enter into the land.

In their estimation, Torah study would suffer irrevocably. If they were chosen as the first generation of Torah it meant—at least, in their minds—that they had to absorb the Torah without the admixture of any other influences or pressures. Otherwise they reasoned, they would transmit a watered down version of Torah to the next generation. With the passage of time and the further Torah knowledge would go from the time it was given at Sinai, Torah would become so adulterated and altered, as to render it unrecognizable.

Hence, they concluded, the conquest of Israel was not for their generation. Their generation had to be pure in its commitment to and absorption of Torah.

In fact, they were right, at least in the sense that they were not ready to enter the Promised Land and to fulfill the even greater challenge that it entailed.

According to Rashi, the ideal person—the *eshkol* personality—is one whose knowledge is unadulterated because his dedication to Torah is unequivocal. There is no room for any other influences in one's life other than Torah.

This may explain why they took this cluster of grapes—the Eshkol—to symbolize the idea that one needs an environment that allows for unadulterated Torah study.

To further symbolize how their goal of total mastery of Torah will become impossible to attain in Israel they picked this huge cluster that had to be carried by two. This was to underscore that the burden of becoming an Eshkol will be too great to bear in the Promised Land.

The Incomplete Eshkol

But, in the final analysis, they were wrong. Because the cluster of grapes—the Eshkol—with its connotation of completeness also suggests that Torah is incomplete

without perfection of character. One must interact with others. Living in a spiritual cocoon will not afford one with the opportunity to develop social skills and refinement of character. And the fact that the cluster of grapes they picked required two to carry it was a positive symbol. Torah wants us to share and shoulder the burden of Torah with others. It is what makes our Torah study complete because it is combined with refinement of character and connection with others.

The Debate Revolved Around Meaning of Eshkol

In other words, the "debate" between the good spies, Joshua and Caleb and the ten evil spies revolved around the definition of a perfect, well rounded, person—an "eshkol." According to the spies, the Eshkol-personality is single-minded in his devotion to the study of Torah, leaving no room for anything else.

According to Moses and the good spies, an Eshkol personality is one who combines the traits of knowledge with refinement of character.

To allude to this debate, the Torah tells us that they brought a huge cluster of grapes—an Eshkol—because their argument was about the prospects of achieving this goal in the Promised Land. The evil spies contended that it would be impossible. The good spies maintained that it was

not only possible, but that only in the Land of Israel would it become possible to attain this goal.

One Short of Moshiach

The numerical value of the word eshkol in Hebrew is 357, which is one short of the value of the word Moshiach (358).

This might be an allusion to the fact that it does not suffice to reach perfection by devoting oneself to exclusive Torah study. One can be an eshkol—acquire total mastery of Torah knowledge—and yet not bring Moshiach. One must also add the one, the belief in the oneness of G-d which requires of us to recognize that all of the world must be integrated into one's system. To be an eshkol without the "One" leaves one stranded in the desert.

To bring Moshiach we must recognize that Torah study must be combined with acts of kindness and reaching out to the outside world and bringing the light of Torah to the entire universe. This will usher in the age when we will see the fulfillment of the eshkol ideal in both forms—total and perfect mastery of Torah coupled with total mastery of one's heart.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

WE ARE ALL GIANTS

Galus has imposed a certain measure of self-doubt in us. When we look around the world today we can become apprehensive over the prospects of our being able to "conquer" the land and enter the Messianic Age.

While we must be realists and recognize our shortcomings we may not do so by underestimating the giant that exists within us.

Indeed, the Rebbe has taught us that while our generation may appear to be the "heels of the heels" of all of the past generations, we are, in one very significant fashion, the most unique generation of all of history.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

WE ARE ALL GIANTS

The Slander

Much has been said about the spies Moses sent to scout the Land of Israel at the request of the Jewish people. Moses asked them to survey the land, its strengths and weaknesses. Upon their return, they gave a mixed report. First they described the virtues of the land. They then described how powerful the inhabitants were and the how fortified their cities were. These words were clearly intended to frighten the Jewish people.

At that point Caleb, one of the two spies who remained faithful to G-d and Moses, declared:

> "We will definitely go up! We will take possession of it, for we are certainly capable of conquering it!

The other spies countered him by saying:

> "We are unable to go up against the people for they are stronger than us."

The word in Hebrew "*memenu*-than us," Rashi says can also be translated as "from Him," intimating that they believed the inhabitants of the land to be even more powerful than G-d!

The Torah then states,

> "They produced a [slanderous] report about the land which they had explored, telling the children of Israel 'The land we passed through and explored is a land that consumes its inhabitants. All the people we saw in it are enormous men. We saw nefilim-giants there, supersized giants from the neflim giants. We appeared like grasshoppers in our eyes, and that's how we were in their eyes."

When they said that the land consumes its inhabitants, Rashi explains, they were referring to having seen how the Canaanites were constantly burying their dead. G-d had intended this spate of deaths to distract the Canaanites from the spies. It succeeded but the spies interpreted it unfavorably.

Where Did It Begin?

The spies clearly slandered the Land of Israel in their report. The Torah implies that their slander began when they described the land as one that consumes its

inhabitants. Hadn't they slandered the land earlier when they spoke of the strength of the people followed by the statement that Jewish people would not be able to conquer it?

The *Kli Yakar* asks another question, why is their description of the land as consuming its inhabitants even considered slander when they were merely describing what they saw?

The truth is that the two questions cancel each other out. Until the spies actually stated that the people would not be able to conquer the land, what they had said previously about the land was not slanderous. They were merely describing the state of the land and its inhabitants, precisely as Moses told them to do. However, once they drew the rebellious conclusion that it would be impossible for them to conquer the land, anything they said afterwards would have to be considered slander because their intent was clear.

However, the question now reverses itself: If they were out to slander the land why did they leave how the land consumes its inhabitants until later in the report? Why did they wait to mention it only after they declared that the children of Israel could not conquer it?

Yet another question can be raised, the answer of which is the key to answering this question:

The spies did not initially say the land was unconquerable; they merely implied it by describing the strength of the people and cities of the land. Only after Caleb declared that the people would inherit the land did they state explicitly that it would not be possible. Why did they wait until then to draw their ill-advised conclusion?

The answer may be (see Ramban) that they were hoping that the Jewish people would reach that conclusion on their own from hearing the spies' "objective" report about the land. Only when Caleb appeared to thwart their plan by declaring emphatically that it would indeed be possible, did they stridently respond that it would not be possible.

Once the spies vocalized their heresy it changed the whole tone of their opposition. Until then they were careful not to denigrate the land. On the contrary, they praised the land for its fruit. The fear they tried to engender concerned the land's inhabitants and fortified cities; they did not openly disparage the land at the start.

Why Didn't They Speak Openly?

One might suggest that their reluctance to speak openly against the conquest or disparage the land itself was to deflect blame for instigating the rebellion. The spies wanted the people to draw their own conclusion and then demand avoiding Israel. To disparage the land would have been a

direct attack against G-d's description of the land as a good land.

However, when they saw how their plan was in danger of being defeated by Caleb they resorted to a full blown slander of the Land. The slander was, in effect, a declaration of war against G-d, Moses and the Land of Israel.

A Land of Contradictions

To more deeply understand what the spies meant by adding that the land consumed its inhabitants and that it was inhabited by giants we must address two other questions:

First, how was their description of the land as one that consumed its inhabitants prove that the Jewish people would not be able to conquer it? It merely pointed to the unsustainability of the land.

Second, how could the otherwise righteous people, chosen by Moses himself, have so degenerated that they were willing to state that the inhabitants of the land were more powerful than G-d?

When the spies juxtaposed the two critical pieces of information, that the land consumed its inhabitants and that there were giants there, they meant to color Israel as a

land of contradictions. On the one hand, it consumed its inhabitants, which pointed to the land's negative impact on life. On the other hand, its inhabitants were giants; people in whom life was pronounced and robust.

The Survival of the Fittest

To reconcile this contradiction the spies were suggesting that Israel was a land that could only be conquered and settled by giants. This was their version of the "survival of the fittest" belief. "Yes," they argued "if you are a giant you could survive, but if you are puny grasshoppers like us then how could we expect to conquer such a land?"

The spies meant this as a metaphor. Just as only the strongest and fittest could tolerate the land, so too, spiritually, only those Jews who were "giants" could succeed in making Israel into the land G-d had intended for them.

This metaphor was the spies' attempt to temper their rebellion against G-d's promise that they could conquer the land. Sure, G-d was right when the people were spiritual giants. But the fact that the people demanded to send spies, not being content only with G-d's promise to them, proved that they truly were "little" people ("grasshoppers") whose faith was feeble.

Therefore, when the spies said the inhabitants of the land were stronger than G-d, they were not so foolish as to think that G-d could not conquer the land. Rather, they meant that the inhabitants of the land were more powerful than the G-dly power dwelling **within** the Jewish people themselves. The people were "tiny" because they didn't feel G-d's presence within themselves. How then, surmised the spies, could the Jewish people expect to conquer the land, when it could not sustain anyone other than a giant? Perhaps, at some later date, when their faith had become stronger, it would be possible for them to conquer the land.

They were woefully wrong. The Jewish people were indeed giants. As the Alter Rebbe points out in his classic work, *Tanya* (Chapter 29), the Jews had a change of heart as soon as they were rebuked by G-d; they wanted to dash off and conquer the land. This, the Alter Rebbe states, was proof that they always had the requisite belief in G-d. It was only their surface crust of evil that stood in the way. G-d's message removed the evil cover and their true faith emerged.

What the spies had failed to see was the G-dly greatness contained within themselves and their fellow Jews; they grossly underestimated the true nature of the Jewish soul. We are all giants!

Yankees or Giants?

The Jewish people have two names: Jacob and Israel. The former describes us in our state of Galus-exile and the latter in the state of Redemption. Jacob is referred to as the "small one," while Israel expresses greatness (Giants). As we stand now on the bridge between exile (Jacob) and Redemption (Israel) we too experience identity crises. Can we, the lowly Jacobs, be worthy of Redemption? Aren't the forces of exile more powerful than the G-dly spirit within us?

This week's parsha is a powerful repudiation of this pernicious Galus mindset. It is true; Galus has imposed a certain measure of self-doubt in us. When we look around the world today and see the devaluation of so many of our values, even within the Jewish and Chassidic community, we can become apprehensive over the prospects of our being able to "conquer" the land and enter the Messianic Age.

The spy saga is meant to disabuse us of the notion that we are not giants. While we must be realists and recognize our shortcomings we may not do so by underestimating the giant that exists within us. Indeed, the Rebbe has taught us that while our generation may appear to be the "heels of the heels" of all of the past generations, we are, in one very significant fashion, the most unique generation of all of

history. Precisely because of our devotion to the Torah and Mitzvos, notwithstanding the darkness and degradation of society, we are rightfully the strongest and most robust generation of history. We are the most worthy and receptive generation for entering the Geulah-Redemption!

We only need to remove the crust to reveal that we are all giants!

ESSAY FOURTEEN

GO SOUTH!

One can crave for the Redemption because it will solve all of our physical problems and satisfy our material needs.

Alternatively, we ought to yearn for the coming of Moshiach because we will be able to reach unimagined levels of Torah knowledge.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

GO SOUTH!

The Debacle

This week's parsha features one of the most tragic events to have occurred to the Jewish people in their journey towards the Promised Land: Ten of the twelve spies sent by Moses return with a slanderous report of the Land of Israel. This debacle was responsible for delaying their entry into the Promised Land by close to forty years.

The tragedy began when ten of the twelve spies decided that their commission as spies was a license for them to also voice their opinion as to whether it was possible to conquer the Promised Land. The very fact that G-d accepted the notion of sending scouts to survey the land was sufficient proof to them that this conquest was intended to be a natural process. If it were a miraculous conquest then there would certainly be no need to survey the land first. Since G-d acceded to their request to send the spies to scout the land it "demonstrated" to them that G-d wanted them to determine if it was possible for the fledgling Jewish nation to succeed in this conquest. They

drew the conclusion that there was no natural basis for them to succeed.

They were clearly mistaken. They exaggerated their role. They were never charged with the mission to make decisions. Their job was to simply report back as to the strengths and weaknesses of the Cananites, and nothing else.

Thus, when they returned and instilled fear in the hearts of the Jewish nation who cried, they were punished severely and as a consequence of the Jewish people's reliance on the ten spies and not on G-d, they were kept in the desert for almost another 40 years. Only the new generation would live to see the Promised Land.

This entire episode which occurred in the formative years of the Jewish people must serve as a lesson for us in our final years on our journey towards the future redemption and our return to the Promised Land.

A Table or a Menorah; Wealth or Wisdom?

In the instructions Moses gave the spies he told them to "go up to the south and go up to the mountain."

The fact that Moses' opening instructions to the spies was to "go up to the south and go up to the mountain" it must contain an important lesson for us in our own journey.

Moses' introductory words to them conveyed a message to the spies that if heeded it would have prevented them from perverting and subverting their mission that brought disaster upon themselves and the entire Jewish people.

What does "going up to the south" imply?

The Talmud (Bava Basra 25b) states: "One who wishes to become knowledgeable should face south [while praying]; whereas one who wishes to be become wealthy should face north." The Talmud then states that these different directions parallel the location of two of the vessels in the Temple Sanctuary.

On the north side of the Temple Sanctuary the Shulchan was situated. The Shulchan was a special table upon which twelve loaves of bread were placed each week. This table symbolized the material blessings that G-d provides. These blessings were generated specifically by the service in the Temple that involved the placing and eating of these twelve loaves that were placed in the north side of the Sanctuary.

On the south side of the Temple, the Menorah—the seven branched Candelabrum—was placed and kindled. The light generated by the Menorah symbolized the knowledge of Torah, which is compared to light.

Therefore, if one directs their mind and heart to the north; i.e., if their focus in prayer that expresses their aspiration is to achieve material prosperity—albeit, in the context of the

Holy Temple, which means that the one's material acquisitions are obtained legally and ethically and that they will be utilized to support the spiritual institutions of the Jewish people — G-d will grant them their wish.

If their focus is on the "south", i.e., the pursuit of knowledge, G-d will grant them their request and they will achieve a higher level of Torah understanding that will enable them to bring light and enlightenment to others as well.

Breathing Intelligence

With this introduction we can understand what Moses had in mind when he told them first to go up to the south. He was intimating to them that they should direct their energies not towards the material benefits that the Promised Land will certainly yield, but they should focus instead on living in Israel for the purpose of acquiring a heightened level of spiritual awareness. This is consistent with the statement in the Talmud (Bava Batra 138b): "The air of Israel makes one wise."

However, Moses was careful to add the caveat, "go **up** to the south." There are two ways of going south, up or down. When one sees intellectual pursuits as the goal and not simply the means to live an ideal moral and spiritual life, the intellect can actually drag the person down. Moses was

quite aware of the pitfall of allowing these intellectual giants to make decisions based solely on their own theories as to the geo-political situation in the land of Cana'an. He knew that they were capable of using their brilliant minds to find ways of rationalizing a conclusion that called for nothing less than rebellion against G-d.

Thus Moses exhorts them: "Go **up** south." By all means go south; use your intellect to the fullest. But make sure that it will take you up to a higher spiritual plane. Make sure that the intellect is in sync with G-d's will and not with your own preconceived notions of what is conquerable and what is not.

Two Scenarios: Which is Yours?

We are living in a most crucial period of history, poised to enter into the ultimate Promised Land. This is meant not only in the geographical sense of the word; that we will all return to the Land of Israel with Moshiach who will rebuild the Holy Temple. It is also intended to describe a new spiritual reality that has been promised to us. We are about to enter into a world that is good beyond anything we can imagine.

There are two valid scenarios for the future redemption.

One scenario is that we will have a world of peace and prosperity.

The other scenario is that we will attain the highest level of spiritual enlightenment.

Our desire for Moshiach may be based on either consideration. One can crave for the Redemption because it will solve all of our physical problems and satisfy our material needs. Alternatively, we ought to yearn for the coming of Moshiach because we will be able to reach unimagined levels of Torah knowledge.

Maimonides describes these two scenarios in the following manner:

> "The Sages and prophets did not yearn for the Messianic Era in order to rule over the entire world, nor in order that they have dominion over the gentiles, nor that they be exalted by them, nor in order that they eat, drink and celebrate. Rather, their aspiration was that [the Jewish people] be free [to involve themselves] in the Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress or disturb them…"

Maimonides continues—and with these words he concludes his monumental work of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah:

> "In that Era there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance and all the delicacies will be as freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. The Jews will therefore be great sages and know the hidden matters, and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the [full] extent of mortal potential; as it is written, "For the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed."

From the above it is clear that there will be material gain and even abundant delicacies. And if the prospect of enjoying these delicacies motivates us to work towards Redemption, it is still acceptable. Nevertheless, our primary reason for desiring the Messianic Redemption is for the new vistas of knowledge that will be open to us.

And this is the timely message conveyed to us in Moses' first instructions to the spies: In our quest for a better world it behooves us to aspire to the higher motivation—"go south!" Our desire should be for the knowledge.

But, the follow up message should be that in our quest for greater knowledge, we must realize that the knowledge is subordinate to the way we live our lives.

By all means, "Go south!" But, make sure that you are not descending into the valley in that pursuit, but climbing the mountain.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

AS YOU SAID

The word of a tzadik-a righteous and holy person, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains, is endowed by G-d with the power to make things happen.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

AS YOU SAID

Forgiven because of Moses

Moses, at the request of the Jewish people, sent twelve spies to scout the land of Canaan. When the spies returned, ten of them slandered Israel, and even doubted the ability of the Jewish people to conquer it. The nation accepted their pessimistic assessment and rejected the word of G-d.

At that point, G-d threatened to destroy the Jewish people. Moses intervened and pleaded with G-d to spare the people. One of Moses' arguments was that if G-d was to destroy them in the desert, the nations of the world would say that G-d was incapable of defending His own people against the more powerful Canaanites.

G-d relented and told Moses, "I have forgiven them as you said."

The question is asked, why G-d had to add the words "as you said?" Wouldn't it have sufficed if G-d had stated simply, "I have forgiven them." It would have been self-

understood that the reason G-d forgave them was because of Moses' entreaties to G-d.

Who Cares what the Nations Will Say?

Rashi appears to have anticipated this question when he writes that the words "as you said" is a specific reference to Moses' argument that people would deny G-d's ability to prevail over the Canaanites if the Jewish nation would have perished in the desert. It was the argument that saved the day.

However, this answer too requires further explanation. The great Chassidic Master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev asks why would G-d be concerned what the other nations would think? G-d controls the thoughts of man. He could thus have easily prevented them from entertaining such a notion. Why then was this particular argument advanced by Moses so persuasive?

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak provides the following answer to this question:

The Words of a Tzadik Create reality

In truth, if Moses had not argued that the destruction of the Jewish people would lead the nations to think that G-d was incapable of fighting the Canaanites, it would not have

occurred to them to think so. G-d could have caused them to attribute the destruction of the Jewish nation to some other cause.

However, by Moses making the argument that it would cause the nations to doubt G-d's power, he actually created the mechanism for the nations to entertain the notion that G-d could not defeat the Canaanites.

The word of a tzadik-a righteous and holy person, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains, actually is endowed by G-d with the power to make things happen.

Thus G-d tells Moses, "I have forgiven them as you said," with the emphasis on the words "as you said." Because you said it, because you initiated the argument, that is why it became a reality. And this reality saved the Jewish nation.

This commentary of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak echoes the saying of our Talmudic Sages that "a righteous person decrees and G-d fulfills it." Obviously, it does not mean that the righteous have more power than G-d. Rather it means that G-d has vested His power in those who act, speak and think in a G-dly manner.

The prophet Isaiah said about the Jewish people, "And your nation are all righteous." The prophet is referring to our potential righteousness that derives from our soul as the verse continues: "They are the branch of my planting, My handiwork in whom I take pride."

But potential righteousness is not enough. Every mitzvah we perform helps to actualize that potential righteousness. And by virtue of this overt righteousness G-d endows our words with the power to make things happen.

Our Words Have Tremendous Power

This fact has a direct bearing on our own generation. While we know our faults and we might therefore not think of ourselves as holy and righteous people, the Torah teaches us otherwise. Every one of us is filled with Mitzvos, as the Talmud states that even the "sinners of Israel are filled with Mitzvos as a pomegranate is filled with seeds;" how much more so our generation that can certainly not be characterized as "sinners."

Indeed, the Mitzvos we perform are unique. Precisely because we live in challenging times every Mitzvah we do has enhanced power. We should not underestimate our power to say to G-d—as we do in our daily liturgy in multiple ways—to bring an end to the suffering and pain that is associated with exile and bring us Moshiach and the promised Redemption.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TOURIST OR TORAH-IST?

Our way of preparing for the imminent coming of Moshiach is understandably to strengthen our commitment to the teachings of the Torah.

But more specifically, it involves the process of "opening our eyes," to becoming "Torah tourists"—to see things through the prism of Torah.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TOURIST OR TORAH-IST?

The Pitfalls of Touring

The English word "tourist" most likely has its roots in the Biblical term for scouting the land that appears in this week's parsha multiple times.

Moses charges the leaders of the twelve tribes to become spies with the mission of "touring" the land. In the original Hebrew, the word (after the prefix that means "and they shall") is "*touru*." Throughout the parsha the word used is not the Hebrew word for "spying" but the word that can be translated as "touring," "surveying" "scouting" or "exploring" the land.

Interestingly, at the end of the parsha, in an entirely unrelated subject, the Torah uses the same root. When it commands us to wear the tzitzis-fringes on the corners of our garments, the Torah admonishes us to look at the tzitzis, "and you shall not follow your hearts and eyes." Here too the Torah employs the word "(sa)suru," in terms of **not** following the desires of your heart and eyes. Rashi,

the principal commentator of the Torah, applies the meaning of scouting and spying to this word. We should not allow our hearts and eyes to serve as spies for the body, enabling it to stray.

We can see from this week's parsha that being a tourist is fraught with danger. From the beginning of the parsha we see how the original "tourists"—i.e., ten of the twelve spies—ended up dying a tragic death and preventing an entire generation of Jews from entering the Promised Land.

And in the end of the parsha we see how the Torah regards the touring of the heart and eyes to be so potentially harmful.

What is it about being a "tourist" that proved to be so deleterious to the Jews then, and continues to plague us even today?

Torah and Touring

To answer this question it should be pointed out that the Hebrew word *tour*, is almost identical to the word Torah. The letters are the same, just the vowels are different. Is there any connection between these two words? Are they similar or are they opposites?

Let's first discuss what these two words have in common. A tourist keeps his or her eyes open. We don't take a trip

to a foreign country to stay in our hotel 24 hours a day. We take our cameras and let our eyes and our extended eyes (i.e., cameras) view as much as we can.

Likewise Torah is a text that gives us the means to see the world. The very word Torah is derived from a root that means: instruction, direction and guidance because Torah was intended for it to be our eye to the world. Torah instructs us not only what we should do and avoid doing, but it also gives us direction in life by teaching us how to view the world in general and any and every situation in particular.

Eyes of the Community

However, since we cannot always find the Torah's view on a given matter, the Torah therefore commands us to follow the teachings of the Sages, who are appropriately referred to in this week's parsha as "the eyes of the community." They enable us to see things through the prism of Torah.

The difference between conventional touring and "Torah-touring" is that touring is to see the world through physical and human lenses, whereas Torah enables us to see the world through G-dly lenses.

When Moses sent the spies to Israel, he wanted them to tour the Land of Israel; but he wanted them to do it

through the prism of G-d's plan for the Jewish people to enter, conquer and settle the Land.

See the Land from G-d's Vantage Point

In G-d's instructions to Moses, He said explicitly: "Send out men for yourself to explore the Land of Cana'an, which **I am giving to the children of Israel**." Here G-d added the words "which I am giving to the children of Israel," that seem to be unnecessary. Haven't we already been told numerous times that this was the land that G-d intended for the children of Israel? Why emphasize this point here again?

The answer is clear. While G-d consented to the sending of these spies to become tourists and explore the land, He wanted it explored from **His** vantage point. G-d wanted them to see the land through the prism, mindset and premise that it was indeed conquerable because G-d was giving it to them. While they were to use their own eyes to survey the land, they were to have their eyes reflect the vision of G-d vis-à-vis the land.

Their error was that they viewed it through their own limited lenses and myopic view.

And this is what distinguishes the art of conventional touring from the way Torah takes us for a tour of life;

guiding us through all of its confusing pathways. Torah is the ultimate GPS that tells us when to go right and when to go left and when to go straight ahead.

Torah Transcends Political Views

In the Jewish community, we find Jews who have adopted all sorts of political views. There are Jews on the right and there are Jews on the left and there are Jews in the center. In truth, the Torah transcends all of these movements and directions because unlike all these ideologies that are man-made, Torah is **G-d's** plan for the world.

Occasionally the Torah will appear to agree with a particular direction and sometimes it will tell us to go in the opposite direction. It does not mean the Torah is liberal or conservative; the Torah is a Divine blueprint for the world that cannot be neatly slotted in to any narrow category.

In the literature of Kabbalah we are taught that Torah represents the Divine attribute of *tiferes*, which means beauty or harmony. Torah is not *chesed*-kindness which is on the right in Kabbalah terminology, neither is it *gevurah*-judgment, which is on the left. Torah combines and synthesizes both, thereby giving us a beautiful, harmonious blend between right and left.

We can be like the spies of old and allow our own limited perspectives color the way we see the Land of Israel and our rights to it, or we can seek guidance and direction from the Torah.

Opening Our Eyes

One of the unfortunate by-products of being in exile is that our Torah vision becomes clouded. We do not see things the way G-d intended us to see them. The Messianic Age—when we will be liberated from exile—is thus not just about peace and freedom; it is also about clearing up all the misconceptions and distortions of reality that is currently the norm, not the exception.

Our way of preparing for the imminent coming of Moshiach, generally speaking, is understandably to strengthen our commitment to the teachings of the Torah. But more specifically, it involves the process of "opening our eyes," to becoming "Torah tourists"—to attempt to see things through the prism of Torah.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SEEING AND DESIRING

We should follow our heart and eyes!

Deep down inside, our heart is faithful and truly desires to get close to G-d.

To make our heart's latent good desires surface, we must follow our eyes. We must use our mind's eye to see the true nature of G-dly energy in everything.

Once we "open our eyes" to see things from a higher perspective, our hearts will begin to beat lustily in expression of its passion for G-dly things.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SEEING AND DESIRING

The Rationale for *Tzitzis*

The end of this week's *parsha* deals with the Mitzvah of *tzitzis*, placing fringes on the four corners of our four cornered garments.

Most commandments are mentioned in the Torah without any explanation or rationale, as to what is their function and objective. The Mitzvah of *tzitzis*, however, is an exception. Here the Torah states that by wearing these fringes on our garments we will be able to remember all of G-d's commandments.

After the Torah tells us that the *tzitzis* is an aid to remember all the commandments, it adds another effect the *tzitzis* have:

"And you will not follow your hearts and your eyes."

The simple meaning of this is that we will not be lead astray by the things that we see ("eyes") and desire.

("heart"). As the Talmud, cited by Rashi, explains, there are two agents to sin: our eyes and our hearts. First our eyes see that which they should not, and then the heart desires, which leads to action..

If this is the meaning of the text, the obvious question arises: Why does it mention the word "heart" before the word "eyes?" Doesn't a person first see the thing that they covet and desire and then have harbor the desire?

Heart Before Eyes

The question can be answered simply with another question: The text first speaks of observing the commandments, and after that it talks of not following one's heart and eyes. The entire order should have been reversed: It should have said: "And you should not follow your eyes and heart and then you will observe the commandments." Why is the order reversed?

And the simple answer is: The Torah is actually telling us that when one wears the *tztizis*, it causes him to observe the Mitzvos because this individual did not follow his heart's desires. And the reason this person did not follow his desires is because he had total control even over his eyes.

The Broker

There is a deeper approach to the Torah's prefacing the heart before the eyes.

While the outer "mechanics" of sin involves sight before desire, the inner "dynamic" of sin require that we first have, on some level, a desire, something to link us to the sinful action. Only then does the actual mechanical process take effect. This process starts when we allow our eyes to begin "scouting" the goods that are not for us. It then leads us to make that desire—that was heretofore latent and nascent—to manifest itself in a case of full blown passion for that which is wrong.

To explain: Rashi applies the term *sarsur,* which means "broker," to the way the eyes and heart function in getting us to sin. The use of the word "broker" is key to understanding the way we function.

A broker is a person who connects two distinct people, a seller and a buyer. Without the broker, the purchaser would never have known that the merchandise existed or that it was for sale, and conversely, the vendor would not have known that there was an interested customer.

When it comes to material goods and physical pleasures, one's relationship and connection to them exists even without the eyes. Our hearts or desires are by nature attuned to the more physical aspects of our existence. A

child knows that it is hungry and wants to eat; it takes years before the child acquires a taste and desire for more aesthetic and spiritual tastes and desires.

Hence the Torah says that when one wears the *tzitzis* it gives the person a different perspective on what is important in life. It changes one's heart and desires, so that one will not want to see what is not theirs and not be affected by what they see even if they were to see it.

The Paradox

This approach helps us to understand the paradox we find with regard to the spies in the beginning of the *parsha*.

The Torah relates how Moses selected 12 spies to scout the land of Israel. Ten of them slandered the land and blasphemed G-d.

The question asked by commentators is: if Moses selected them they must have been decent people, as Rashi claims they indeed were at that time. Yet, paradoxically, they turned out to be so rotten. How could that have happened?

The answer is that they started off as people whose hearts were already in the wrong place, though they did not show their flawed hearts. It was possible that they themselves did not know that their heart had this subconscious antipathy to the conquest and settlement of the land of Israel. And,

indeed, they had free choice to suppress that inclination if it threatened to surface. Moses therefore judged them by their overt behavior, which, at that time, was exemplary. A judge must go by what he sees.

Follow Your Heart and Eyes!

Everything said here about the eyes and heart in the realm of evil applies equally to the realm of goodness and holiness, only in the reverse. We should follow our heart and eyes. Deep down inside, our heart is faithful and truly desires to get close to G-d. However, to make the heart's latent good desires surface, one must follow their eyes. They must use their mind's eye to see the true nature of G-dly energy that is present in everything. Once we "open our eyes" to see things from a higher and deeper perspective, our hearts will begin to beat lustily in expression of its passion for G-dly things.

As we stand poised to enter into the new age of Moshiach, when our hearts, i.e., our spiritual feelings, will open up, our challenge now is to "open our eyes"; and scout the new realities of existence that portend the Era of Redemption, and to view things from a totally different vantage point.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE HUMBLE TREE

If there would be one individual whose entire life was devoted to providing comfort and spiritual nourishment to others, then Moses knew that this nation will be difficult to defeat.

If, however, there were many righteous individuals who kept to themselves and exercised no influence on their fellow citizens, then there was nothing to worry about. Their worthiness would prove futile in the conquest of Cana'an.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE HUMBLE TREE

Are there trees in it or not.?"

Moses instructed the twelve spies he sent to scout the Promised Land to survey the land. Among the detailed instructions in this week's parsha about the many features of the land, we finds the following: "Are there trees in it or not.?"

Commentators raise the question:

Moses already instructed them to determine whether the land was fertile. Of what import was the knowledge that there were trees? If the land was fertile, they could easily grow trees.

Furthermore, the actual Hebrew word that the Torah employs here is the singular *eitz*-tree and not the plural *eitzim*-trees.

In anticipation of these questions, Rashi—citing a Talmudic interpretation—explains this term figuratively. Moses asked

them to see whether there was a **worthy** person, whose merit would protect them. Moses was, not discussing trees, but a person whose goodness will spread its protective branches over the people of the land.

Why use of a Metaphor?

Two questions still persist. First, why did Moses use a figure of speech, when he could have simply said, "see if there are any worthy or righteous people?"

Second, why did Moses have to instruct them to see whether there "was a tree or **not**." It would have sufficed to say that they should see whether there was a tree? Why add the negative, "or **not**?

Two Kinds of Tzadikkim

One interpretation is that there are two types of worthy people: One that is likened to a tree and the one who, though worthy and righteous, is not.

A tree does not exist for itself. Though it has deep roots and a sturdy trunk, its main function is that it provides shade with its many branches and leaves along with nourishment from its fruits.

Moses knew that in a country as populous as Cana'an,

there would inevitably be a few worthy people. That did not concern him. What he was concerned about was that there might be even one solitary worthy individual who behaves like a tree, who provides inspiration to others.

If there would be one individual whose entire life was devoted to providing comfort and spiritual nourishment to others, then Moses knew that this nation will be difficult to defeat. If, however, there were many righteous individuals who kept to themselves and exercised no influence on their fellow citizens, then there was nothing to worry about. Their worthiness would prove futile in the conquest of Cana'an.

Who is a Worthy Person?

On a deeper plane one could suggest that Moses was not presenting the spies with two scenarios: One that there was a worthy person and two, that there was not. Rather Moses was adding clarification as to what constituted a tree, a real worthy individual who can protect his fellow countryman. Moses said they should see if there was a worthy person, who, as we stated before acts like a tree by showing concern for others.

However, that would not suffice. Not every community activist is an asset to the community. It depends on the motives of the community activist. If he or she is motivated

by ego and the pursuit of honor, money and power, then the concern is tainted and the community will still be vulnerable.

If however the "tree," the community activist is "not," he or she is self-effacing and humble, this is the type of leader that can protect his community and make them impervious to an attack from the outside.

Throughout Jewish history, the Jewish nation was blessed with true leaders, whose exclusive concern was the welfare of their community and of the entire Jewish nation.

The True Righteous of Our Generation

Tomorrow, the 28th day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, is the 61st anniversary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's arrival in America, escaping the clutches of the Nazi regime in France. The Rebbe is known for his brilliant scholarship (over 200 volumes of his commentaries and correspondence have been published to date!), as well as for many other monumental achievements. But, what many have noted as the Rebbe's greatest contribution is his total self-sacrifice in the pursuit of leading and helping the Jewish people and indeed, all of humanity. The Rebbe did not rest, or let us rest,, until our mission of bringing the ultimate Redemption is realized.

But, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of England, who the Rebbe mentored, once remarked:

> "Good leaders cultivate followers. Great leaders cultivate leaders. The Rebbe cultivated leaders"

The Rebbe's greatest wish was and continues to be the cultivation of all of us to become the humble "tree" that provides comfort and nourishment to all those who are in need of it. This type of selfless leadership is what will render us impervious to the threat from our enemies from without and strengthen us from within, paving the way for the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY NINETEEN

G-D'S AMBIVALENCE IS ALSO A MESSAGE

A child needs to do things on its own, so that which they do is considered their own effort, not only something they received from someone else. In the words of the Jerusalem Talmud, food obtained unearned is "Shameful Bread."

ESSAY NINETEEN

G-D'S AMBIVALENCE IS ALSO A MESSAGE

The Great Disaster

One of the most enigmatic narratives of the Torah appears in this week's Torah portion of Shlach. Moses, the greatest leader of the Jewish people of all times, sends spies to scout the Land of Cana'an, and his mission turns out not only unsuccessful, but it literally ends in one of the greatest disasters for the Jewish people for all times Ten of the spies return with a most negative view of the Promised Land, causing the Jewish people to cry and express their refusal to enter into the Land of Israel.

As a consequence of this rebellious stance, the spies die in a plague shortly after their return from Israel, and the Jews who wept (all men over the age of twenty) never lived to see the Land they scorned. Instead they die in the desert before reaching the age of 60.

All of this began when the Jewish people approached Moses and asked him to send the spies, as is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. When Moses consulted G-d about this,

G-d's response was – as recorded in the Oral tradition – "Send them if you so desire, I am not telling you to do so."

Why did Moses Take the Risk?

If G-d was so ambivalent about the sending of spies, why did Moses acquiesce to the requests of those who were not so sure about their desire to go to the Promised Land? Why did Moses not realize that G-d's less than enthusiastic support for the plan was an indication that trouble lie ahead?

The answer to these questions lies in the understanding of how G-d guided us in the past and how we are to derive the proper lesson for our lives today. When the Jewish nation was in its infancy, G-d carried them on His "shoulders." He liberated them from slavery, provided them with manna from heaven, water from a rock, surrounded them with Clouds of Glory which not only protected them from their enemies and from the elements, but also leveled all the ground and laundered their garments which miraculously grew with them! G-d then gave them a Torah, the most incredible blueprint for life. At Sinai, G-d revealed Himself to them in an unprecedented manner. Never before or after did a nation or an individual get as much support - both physical and spiritual -from G-d. G-d did everything for them.

Stand on You Own Two Feet

But, that is not how a person grows. A child needs to do things on its own, so that which they do is considered their own effort, not only something they received from someone else. In the words of the Jerusalem Talmud, food obtained unearned is "Shameful Bread." Moses therefore, acceded to their request to send spies to see the land. Moses wanted them to use their own minds and develop their own interest in G-d's plan for them. He knew that it was a risk, but it was a risk that had to be taken in order for them to get out of the stage of infancy where the child depends on his mother exclusively.

Precisely because G-d was ambivalent, Moses understood that this must be the area that G-d felt; the Jews could express independent initiative. This is what would provide them with the opportunity to enter into the Promised Land with their own determination; so they did not have to be "carried" there. But, alas, this generation was not yet ready for such independence. They could not be separated from Moses and the desert conditions that provided them with all their physical as well as spiritual needs.

Mission Placed in Our Lap

The lesson for us is that as we prepare ourselves for the final transition into the Era of Redemption, we have to

recognize that much has been placed in our lap. We cannot expect guidance for every move that we make. Within the framework of Torah, we have to come up with the final initiatives that will push us over the top and bring about the imminent Redemption. If we are not receiving explicit Divine directives, it is because G-d has already charted the course for us in the Torah, now it is our responsibility to use our own initiative to make the redemption a reality.

ESSAY TWENTY

TAKING SHABBOS SERIOUSLY

Shabbos is the day that we cease from doing those innocuous things simply because G-d told us to.

By surrendering our needs, desires and egos–as they are expressed through the actions we do throughout the week–to the will of G-d, we are able to appreciate the value, beauty and meaning in being able to do those same actions during the week.

ESSAY TWENTY

TAKING SHABBOS SERIOUSLY

Shabbos: Cornerstone of Judaism

One of the cornerstones of Judaism is the Shabbos. At the end of last week's parsha, Shlach, the Torah dramatizes its seriousness. A man – who remains anonymous – was caught gathering wood on the Shabbos, and for this he suffered dire consequences.

Now, according to Jewish law the harsh penalties for Sabbath desecration were only operative in the days when we had the Sanhedrin. Furthermore, to incur a penalty for any criminal act, one must have to have been warned by two qualified witnesses, and then immediately transgress in their presence.

In other words, there were almost no instances where a death penalty or other harsh punishments could be meted out to a person who would transgress.

However, in spite of the almost impossibility to mete out these penalties, the Torah makes a point that it did happen

at least one time at the very beginning of our existence as a nation.

The fact that this penalty was associated with Shabbos observance, or the lack thereof, is an indication that there is something so fundamental about this aspect of Jewish observance, that the Torah felt the need to highlight its seriousness.

Why so Many Restrictions

Upon reflection, it is hard to conceive why G-d would care that much whether this man collected the wood on Shabbos. And why has Jewish law imposed so many restrictions for us on this holy day.

The modern mind can easily grasp the significance of the ceremonies and rituals associated with the Shabbos; it can even appreciate the need for a day of rest, to give time for spiritual reflection and growth. However, the modern mind has a difficult time in understanding why we have to refrain from even such innocuous activities as collecting a few pieces of wood, or any of the 39 categories of work that are forbidden on the Shabbos, most of which do not involve tedious labor?

Why can't I do gardening or a drive through the country; enjoyable and restful activities, on the Sabbath?

Deeper Appreciation of Work

To be sure, we can understand how the cessation of work on the Shabbos can help us appreciate the beauty and value of work the other six days a week. If not for a day, in which we desist from work, thereby surrendering our independence to a Higher Force, we could not appreciate the independence we enjoy the rest of the week.

By way of illustration:

A person who has never worked a day in his life, cannot possibly appreciate a day of rest.

A person who has never given of himself to another cannot feel good about receiving something for himself.

A person who has never suspended their ego for a few moments cannot feel good when they indulge their ego the rest of the time.

Shabbos is the day that we cease from doing those innocuous things simply because G-d told us to. And by surrendering our needs, desires and egos–as they are expressed through the actions we do throughout the week–to the will of G-d, we are able to appreciate the value, beauty and meaning in being able to do those same actions during the week. They are no longer taken for granted.

But this still doesn't explain the severity of the punishment.

Stand at Attention

To understand the underlying reason for not working on Shabbos, a military analogy is in order.

A soldier appears before a high ranking officer must stand at attention and salute his superior. If, at that time, he decides to clean his rifle, shine his boots, mend his uniform and other activities he must do when not in the presence of his superiors, it would he certainly be regarded as profound disrespect and a breach of military discipline.

Similarly, our work throughout the week is akin to the soldier whose job it is to conquer the territory of the enemy. Our task is to take the raw and hostile world and refine it and ultimately transform it, until it has been "conquered" by the forces of goodness and holiness.

Yet, on the Shabbos, we are in the presence of the ultimate Superior. At that time, we stand at virtual attention, by not doing the same things we do all week long. It is not that those activities are bad. On the contrary, they are activities mandated by the Torah that we engage in so that we make the world into a dwelling place for G-d.

Yet, one day a week, G-d wants us to "stand at attention," figuratively speaking, and show our recognition that He is our Leader, whose purpose we fulfill throughout the week.

Perpetual Shabbos

The Messianic Age has been described, Biblically, as the Shabbos of existence. It is the time that we will be able to feel the spiritual bliss and honor of being in the presence of G-d all week long. The holiness, pleasure and serenity of Shabbos we will experience all the time.

Of course, the Shabbos day itself will "rise" to a higher plane, and we will be exposed to a level of bliss that is beyond our comprehension and imagination.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

TZITZIS AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

When we take a tour of life, we must know what to look for and how to look for things.

Aside from the obvious and literal understanding of not looking at things that G-d forbids us to gaze at, because it can lead us to temptation, the idea of knowing how "to tour" implies the need to see things in their right light.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

TZITZIS AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tying a String to Remember

When was the last time you tied a knot around your finger to serve as a reminder?

It is interesting to note that the tradition of tying knots to serve as reminders is Biblical in origin.

At the end of this week's parsha, the Torah requires of us to wear Tzitzis, or the fringes that we are to attach to the four corners of our garments. These fringes, the Torah states, is to remind us of all of G-d's commandments and we will not be led astray by our hearts and eyes.

In what way are the Tzitzis reminders of all the commandments?

Our sages tell us that the word Tzitzis itself is numerically equivalent to 600. There are eight strands and five knots in each of the four corners. When we combine these figures, 600+8+5, we arrive at the number 613, the precise number of Biblical commandments.

The fact that the connection of Tzitzis to the 613 commandments is arrived at by combining three components of Tzitzis — its numerical value, the number of strands and the number of knots — implies that there are three key characteristics of Tzitzis.

600

The number 600 in Hebrew is spelled by the two letters *Tav reish*, or *tour*. The root of this word is the same as the word used in the verse that describes the effect Tzitzis have on us: "*V'lo* ***Sasuru***..-and you shall not **look** after your hearts and eyes." The Tzitzis — which is etymologically related to the word *tzotz* that means to gaze — represent the need for the Jew to know how to use his or her eyes.

Remarkably, the same root is used in the very beginning of this week's parsha with respect to the spies who were told to "scout the land" - *V'yasuru.* It is very likely that the English word "tour" derives very directly from the same Hebrew word that means to see, survey, or scout. The spies had trouble knowing how to look at the land. Instead of seeing the good in every aspect of the Promised Land, they saw things in a negative light.

Touring the World through the Prism of Tzitzis

Thus, the message of Tzitzis, that numerically adds up to the word "tour," suggests the need to see things from the correct vantage point. When we take a tour of life, we must know what to look for and how to look for things. Aside from the obvious and literal understanding of not looking at things that G-d forbids us to gaze at, because it can lead us to temptation, the idea of knowing how "to tour" implies the need to see things in their right light.

By way of analogy: A tourist visits the Western Wall and is unaware of its spiritual significance as the remnant of the wall the surrounded the holiest structure on earth, the *Bais Hamikdash*! This individual can hardly be described as a tourist

Every time we wear the Tzitzis, look at them, or even learn about them, it beckons us to learn how to become a good tourist of life.

Detachment

But there are two other components to the idea of Tzitzis. There are 8 strands on each of the four corners. We have had several opportunities in the past to explain the significance of the number eight as a symbol of aloofness and detachment from the ordinary, natural and

commonplace that is associated with the number seven.

When "touring" the world around us, looking for opportunities to find meaning in life, a certain measure of detachment from the world is in order. When touring life's experiences, our task is to illuminate and sublimate them, not to have the experience dominate us.

Creating Connections

The third component of the Tzitzis is its five knots. Knots are the bonds we create to make and strengthen connections.

As we tour life, we must realize that the ultimate goal is to create connections. These include: Connections between us and the world, connections between the world and G-d and connections between one person and another. But, these connections must be associated with the number five, representing the five books of the Torah and the five levels of the soul.

Whatever connections that the Torah does not sanction is not a legitimate connection and will not lead to the goal of 613, representing the totality of Judaism.

Moreover, our connections must be an expression of all the five levels of our soul, I.e., action, emotion, understanding, will and pleasure.

Messianic Age: Perfect Tour

In the present day and age, we cannot observe all of the 613 commandments. This means that our "tour" of life is incomplete, our ability to relate to life's experiences is compromised, and our capacity to connect is limited. Nevertheless, by committing ourselves to the practice of the law and spirit of Tzitzis, we will soon usher in the age of Moshiach, that will make our tour of life complete.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

PRISON AND CHOMETZ

Prison is not a suitable punishment because it deprives the person of his or her ability to function as a full-fledged human being.

The prisoner cannot express and actualize his or her full potential.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

PRISON AND CHOMETZ

A Puzzling Midrash

The Torah records the story of a certain, nameless, individual who violated Shabbos. Moses did not know what his punishment should be, so they put him in prison until they could determine what punishment would be appropriate.

There is a cryptic Midrash that draws the following analogy from this episode:

"From here we can derive the Biblical obligation to search for Chometz."

The Midrash refers to our obligation to search for Chometz (any mixture of flour and water allowed to rise) in our possession on the night before Passover.

This Midrash belongs to the genre of "Midrash Peliah;" Midrashic materials that were written deliberately in the form of riddles, presumably to inspire greater interest in understanding the Torah and fathoming its deeper meaning.

In addition to Midrash's ability to enhance our Torah study, Midrash also deals with the underlying layer of Torah knowledge. Also, many secrets of the Torah are embedded in its teachings.

We must therefore try to fathom or decipher the riddle of the seemingly arbitrary connection between the Sabbath violator's prison sentence and the obligation to search for Chometz.

Second, we must also try to understand:

a) the connection between prison and the search for Chometz;

b) the connection of both prison and Chometz to Shabbos, inasmuch as these two themes are introduced in the narrative of one who failed to keep Shabbos;

c) the deeper message embedded within this text; and

d) how we can apply it to our own lives, particularly with respect to our preparation for the final Redemption.

Prison: Cruel and Unusual Punishment

On the surface, one could explain the Midrash's cryptic comparison by questioning the entire premise of imprisonment of a Sabbath violator.

When we survey the punishments recorded in the Torah for a variety of crimes we do not find imprisonment among them. There are fines, corporal punishment and even in extreme cases capital punishment, but not prison. Why?

The Rebbe explained that prison is not a suitable punishment because it deprives the person of his or her ability to function as a full-fledged human being. The prisoner cannot express and actualize his or her full potential. A human being was sent into this world to achieve important things.

Even the death penalty is preferable to incarceration in the most extreme cases because once the person is no longer alive he or she has no further need to grow spiritually; his or her life's mission has ended.

However, to keep a person alive, still with a mission in life and the ability to fulfill it, but then imprison him or her and deny that opportunity, is a form of cruel and unusual punishment from the perspective of Torah.

To be sure, the Rebbe did not advocate opening up the prisons and letting all the dangerous criminals out. Rather, he urged society to find more humane and rehabilitative ways of dealing with a transgressor. Prison should only be used as a last resort to protect society from an incorrigible and violent criminal. Stifling human creativity and achievement is itself a terrible crime. From the Torah's

perspective the goal of punishment is not vengeance; it is our tool for rehabilitating the criminal by helping him or her grow morally and spiritually. Anything we do to stifle that process harms society as well as the criminal.

It is hard to understand why the Torah states that they imprisoned the person who violated Shabbos. If prison is so objectionable why would it be tolerated for even a short period of time?

The Connection

The obvious answer is that a distinction must be made between imprisonment as a punishment and imprisonment as a way of guaranteeing that the accused will not escape punishment.

Hence we derive from this that although the act of incarceration did not possess any intrinsic value as an appropriate punishment it nevertheless was done to ensure the proper punishment in the future.

We can now understand the Midrash's statement that we derive a Biblical obligation to search for the Chometz from this episode.

Chometz is Biblically prohibited to us during the Festival of Passover. We may not eat or derive benefit from it. We may not even possess it. How do we guarantee that we

will not possess Chometz during Passover? After all even if we think our property is Chometz-free isn't it possible that there still might be Chometz that has eluded us?

Therefore, to ensure that we do not violate the law against possession of Chometz during the prohibited period we search for it on the night before Passover. There is no intrinsic value in the search for Chometz because if we search for it and find it and fail to destroy it or remove it from our ownership before the prohibited period, the search will have been in vain.

This is very similar to the incarceration of the Sabbath violator whereby it was not an intrinsically valuable act. On the contrary, it flies in the face of the Torah's abhorrence of the use of imprisonment and deprivation of freedom. The same is true with regard to Chometz. Searching for it is not intrinsically a worthwhile act; it does however serve the ultimate goal of ensuring that we will ultimately be rid of all our Chometz.

G-d's Regrets

There is a deeper parallel between prison and Chometz.

The Talmud (*Sukkah* 52b) states that there are four things G-d "regrets" having created. One of them is exile and the other is the Yetzer Hara, the evil inclination.

Obviously, when G-d is said to regret something we should not take it literally. Rather, as the Rebbe mentioned, we should interpret G-d's regret as His way of fulfilling the Mitzvah of Teshuvah, repentance. The Midrash states that G-d keeps all of the commandments that He gave us. It follows that He must also observe the Mitzvah to repent. How does he fulfill this commandment? He gives us the potential to reverse the process of Galus and of evil. G-d's regret is the power he invests in us to undo the Galus and to rid ourselves of the Yetzer Hara.

Galus and Prison

The metaphor for Galus is prison, which inhibits our ability to serve G-d in the fullest measure. In Galus we unable to observe most of the 613 commandments because we don't have the Bais Hamikdash as well as other conditions needed for their fulfillment. The pressures of exile, the persecution we have suffered, etc., also stifle our ability to perform the Mitzvos and study Torah with complete peace of mind.

The metaphor for the evil inclination, our Sages tell us, is Chometz, the mixture of flour and water that has been allowed to rise. Chometz thus also represents the inflated ego which, if left unchecked, can cause us to go astray.

Thus, the Midrash says, prison, although it is temporary, is the equivalent as the search for Chometz. Both prison, the

metaphor for Galus, and Chometz the metaphor for our evil impulse, are regrettable. We would be a lot happier if we never experienced Galus and we didn't need to search for Chometz-evil to destroy it.

However, G-d created these two entities so they must provide us with some benefit we couldn't obtain without them. What are those benefits?

The benefit of Chometz is that when we perform Teshuvah with love we have more than the capacity to erase the past; we can actually transform past negativity into positive energy, as the Talmud states.

Thus, it is a good idea to search for the Chometz. If we presumed that our house was Chometz-free but failed to look for it, we would lose the opportunity to transform the negative into a Mitzvah. By first searching, discovering and then burning the Chometz we have actually turned the negative into a powerful positive.

The same is true with respect to Galus. While it would have been much more pleasant to have avoided Galus, nevertheless once we lived in and through Galus, it provided us with a benefit that we could never have had without it.

Chassidus teaches us that Galus, while negative in the way it manifests itself, actually derives from a lofty and elusive G-dly source. In addition, the fact that we lived through

Galus with great Mesiras Nefesh-self-sacrifice to maintain our Jewish life has enriched us immeasurably.

In the Final Redemption we will begin to appreciate the loftiness achieved from the past exile and be able to enjoy the fruit of our labor.

The Connection to Shabbos

There are few places in the Torah where prison is mentioned. The fact that it is mentioned in conjunction with the person who violated Shabbos suggests that there is thematic connection between prison and Shabbos violation.

Shabbos is a foretaste of Redemption, a period of total peace, tranquility and holiness.

Our Sages alluded to this when they taught that if the Jewish people would observe even one Shabbos they would be redeemed. The collective power of serenity and holiness would be so powerful that it would break down the confining walls and stifling atmosphere of Galus.

When a Jew in the desert violated Shabbos so soon after G-d gave us this incredible gift of a foretaste of the future, it was a major setback. He brought Galus-prison into the otherwise ideal spiritual atmosphere that the Jewish people enjoyed in the desert. His confinement in prison was not a

punishment; it was emblematic of what he had done. It was regrettable that he should have to be confined with his ability to actualize his potential aborted. However, that is the exact thing one causes when one does not observe the Shabbos; it brings a Galus environment into an otherwise blissful, futuristic world. Galus, we see, is the antithesis of Shabbos.

The lesson we must derive from this is that Shabbos empowers us to live in the future now, which will therefore hasten arrival of a "perpetual Shabbos."